

Youth4Cohesion

Webinar on a “Europe closer to Citizens”

Monday, 20 December 2021

Working language: English

FINAL REPORT

The fifth and final [Youth4cohesion](#) thematic webinar was held on 21 December from 10:15 to 11:30 in the framework of the [Conference on the Future of Europe](#) (CoFoE) as to stimulate a reflection on how young people can have a key role in determining the priorities of the European Union towards a more integrated and sustainable territorial development. High-level decision-makers representing the main European fora of political debate (European Parliament, European Commission, Committee of the Regions) addressed young people and shared with them the challenges ahead, thus engaging them in a lively debate session where they expressed their views for the future of the European Union and how to relaunch its founding values for a full integration of Western Balkan countries.

The event was attended by university students, youth workers and young people representing youth organisations in 10 countries of the Adriatic Ionian area, and by a student delegation of students of the Gymnasium of Kotor (Montenegro).

Agenda

10:15-10:30 Registration of participants

10:30-11:30 Young People are the Future of the EU

Introduction and moderation by Maria Luisa ESPOSITO, Eu Project Officer – Adriatic Ionian Euroregion

The first session of the webinar was aimed at providing a contextual overview of the CoFoE, its objectives and expected results. The topic was addressed by high-level representatives of EU institutions. This introduction

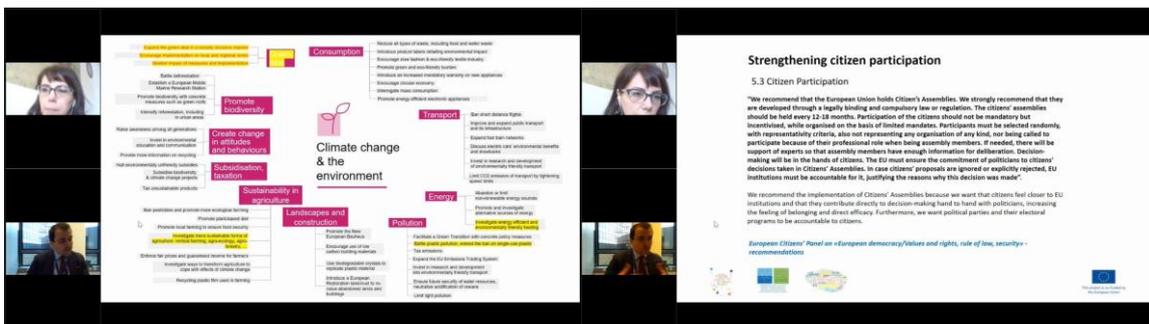


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was supposed to stimulate young people to reflect about European Union's basic values, the role of youth engagement in the context of the Conference on future of Europe (CoFoE) and EU enlargement to the Western Balkans as a great opportunity to strengthen the sense of belonging to the European Union and its democratic processes. Youth participation and young peoples' role in shaping a more efficient and new democratic process was the key point of this introduction.

- **Mr. Anguel K. BEREMLIYSKY**, DG REGIO, European Commission – Common Secretariat of The Conference on the Future of Europe

Mr. Beremliysky presented the CoFoE as a unique and broad bottom-up process of consultation and deliberation involving the European citizens at large and across the borders, especially young people. He underlined the innovative elements of the Conference, devising deliberation and civic tech tools such as citizens panels and a multilingual digital platform. The platform can be used by citizens and civil society organisations to submitting their concrete proposals on a range of [topics](#), organise events and participate in discussion panels and conference plenaries. Mr. Beremliysky highlighted how citizens participation is crucial to the debate hosted in the CoFoE platform.



- **Mr. Giovanni DI STASI**, former President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities – Council of Europe (CoE)

Mr. Di Stasi explained how initiatives such as the Conference on the Future of Europe, by stimulating civic consultation and deliberation, where young people have a prominent and active part into the definition of a new future for the Union, reinforce the efforts made in the past with the [Reflexions on the Future of democracy in Europe](#). Mr. Di Stasi praised the shift from an institution-driven approach to a citizen-centred approach in engagement policies, and explained how this shift help citizens feel confident that their views and concerns are heard by the EU institutions. According to Mr. Di Stasi, the CoFoE is first of all a common cultural reflection on some crucial topics such as climate change, as well, and it is particularly in this field that young people can contribute with their innovative ideas.





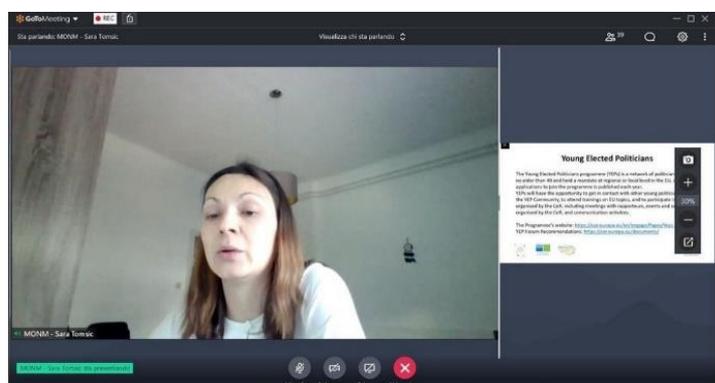
- **Mr. Brando BENIFEI**, Member of the European Parliament

Mr. Benifei, MEP and member of the [plenary](#) of the CoFoE, underlined the importance of extending bottom-up processes to the contribution of young people and of providing them with opportunities to drive the change in the way decision-making processes are dealt with, especially when it comes to current challenges. Young people's bold and innovative ideas must find a place at the top of political agendas and in a necessary process of reform of the EU decision-making process. According to Mr. Benifei, the CoFoE must be seen as a platform for a stronger youth engagement and for promoting the dialogue with the Western Balkans and the other neighbouring countries, as well.



- **Ms. Sara TOMŠIČ**, Deputy Mayor of Novo Mesto (SI) – Member of Young Elected Politicians Programme (YEP) – Committee of the Regions (CoR)

Ms. Tomsic presented the [Young elected politicians](#) (YEP) and highlighted how the role of local and regional politicians is crucial in feeding the CoFoE with messages and priorities coming from Europe's cities and regions. Ms. Tomsic is a signatory of the 14 [recommendations](#) that the YEP Annual Forum has brought to the CoR's plenary. The document states the need to building resilient and inclusive communities, to fully endorse the digital transformation and to committing to creating a lively local democracy for a healthy European democracy, as well as to providing young people with jobs and education for. Ms. Tomsic stressed how the local and regional level of representation can be crucial in favouring these processes and in favouring youth participation to them as well, as they are the closest to the citizens and must be accountable for solving problems on the ground.



11:30-12:20 Debate. The Future of the EU through the lenses of Adriatic Ionian young people

Moderated by Alfredo MARINI, Project Assistant at the Secretariat of the Adriatic Ionian Euroregion

The second session of the webinar was an occasion for Adriatic Ionian young people to voice their priorities, expectations and concerns about their future in the EU, as also linked to a full EU integration of the Western Balkan countries. The session saw the participation and the attendance of university students, youth professionals, young elected politicians (Italy and North Macedonia) and young people and youth organisations' representatives from the Adriatic Ionian countries (Albania, Greece, Italy, Montenegro, Slovenia), and by a student delegation from the Gymnasium of Kotor (Montenegro).

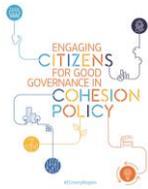


Mr. Marco COLECCHIA, Secretary of the Young European Federalists Termoli (IT), highlighted his wish to see the CoFoE end up with a new path for migration policies, beginning with a true, single foreign policy to create a safer access to Europe.

Students of the Gymnasium of Kotor (ME), represented by their rapporteur, **Ms. Vasilisa RAŠOVIĆ**, addressed several topics, pointing out the difficulties of seeing a concrete perspective of entering the EU and of having access to the related opportunities such as access to mobility and student exchange programmes, being part of a single market where people and goods can freely move, despite all the political claims and pledges by domestic politicians.

Mr. Andrea CORBO (IT), Youth4Cohesion participant, focused on the possible outcomes of the CoFoE as related to the green transition, discussing how the promotion of carbon neutrality through new circular economic and sustainable development models can strategically help the UE achieve energy self-sufficiency.

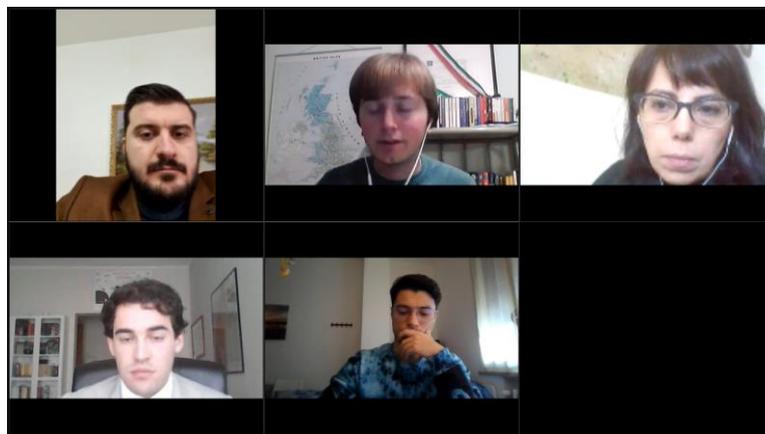




Mr. Kristian KINA (AL) highlighted how among Western Balkan countries Albania is very supportive of EU integration and reported, as former student leader at the University of Tirana, that Albanian young people perceive the EU and their role in supporting the integration process as crucial to a definitive shift to Western democratic values such as rule of law and the respect of fundamental human rights.

Mr. Edoardo CARMINUCCI, a newly young elected member of the City Council of Rimini (IT), highlighted the role and duty of young elected politicians in informing about how much local economies rely on the EU as well as about how concrete the impact of EU finding is in young people's lives and communities at large.

Mr. Roberto MOSCARELLA, Young European Federalists (IT) highlighted the crucial part digitalization and digital tools can play in allowing democratic processes, of which the CoFoE is an example, however he also accounted for a number of drawbacks that could endanger democracy, such as the irresponsible use of the internet from extremist movements or the easy spread of fake news e.g. during the Covid pandemic.



12:20-12:30 Live Poll: Collection of recommendations for decision-makers. Conclusions

The live poll collected feedback from young people in Albania, Greece, Italy, Montenegro, Slovenia, who answered the following questions:

- Do you feel close to the EU? What do you think the EU does/could do for you?
- Based on what you've been learning today, do you think that the European values can unite countries across the Adriatic Ionian Region?
- What do you think can be the role of young people in the integration of Western Balkans in the EU?
- What are your recommendations to decision-makers for the future of the EU?

The large majority of respondents (81%) stated to feel very close to the EU and that much of the opportunities for young people (in terms of education, free movement, social inclusion etc.) derive from EU citizenship and use of EU funds. Respondents also mentioned the benefit of European territorial cooperation in the Adriatic Ionian area.



Many points were raised as to what the EU could do better and these are: to strengthen cohesion policies for suburbs and lagging behind areas, to reinforce multilateralism and cooperation, to extend fair opportunities to non-EU members, to enhance EU policies for young people, to allow the European spirit to develop from the new generations.

Everyone agreed that European values can unite countries across the Adriatic Ionian Region and the role of cooperation in creating a context for collaboration on common challenges was highlighted. The suggestion was to improve the dialogue between the two sides of the Adriatic concretely and practically.

Young people saw themselves as strategic actors and stakeholders of a full EU integration of the Western Balkan countries and asked to be provided with a concrete opportunity to voice their ideas and steer the change that is needed for the WB countries to finally join the Union. Some highlighted how Western Balkan young people are more pro-European than young citizens in the EU, because they lack a lot of opportunities that EU young citizens take for granted.

Respondents highlighted how, due also to the Covid pandemic, young people and youth organisations felt forgotten by EU Institutions and they recommended that their role in decision-making and diplomacy be acknowledged at local, national and supranational level.

Many interesting points were raised as to what these young people expect the EU to do, that can be summarised as follows:

- raise awareness about EU among young generations by means of consultations aimed at both investigating young people's sense of Europe and collecting feedbacks about their needs and, based on these results, creating tailored-made events (e.g. webinars, round tables, engagement actions);
- Provide economic support to youth-led projects, with a gender balance cross-cutting approach;
- Involve young people together with political institutions at both local and European level in an open dialogue on key topics such as climate change, gender balance, political and policy priorities;
- Introduce European topics in schools by providing interactive lessons with European experts, politicians and activists.