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NOTE

From: Presidency
To: Permanent Representatives Committee/Council

Subject: Presidency Discussion Note on the Follow-up to the
Conference on the Future of Europe:
- Organisation of the feedback event

Delegations will find in annex a Presidency Discussion Note on the follow-up to the Conference on the Future of Europe, relating to the organisation of the feedback event.

General Affairs Council – 18 October 2022

Presidency Discussion Note on the Follow-up to the
Conference on the Future of Europe: organisation of the feedback event

As indicated during the wrap-up event of the Conference on the Future of Europe on 9 May 2022, as well as in the Final Report on the Outcomes of the Conference and the European Commission's June Communication, the institutions of the European Union are committed to jointly organising a feedback event on the Conference, focused on the citizens, the subject of which should be the progress made in following-up on the Conference since the 9 May.

Before such an event can be organised however, key questions need to be answered, including the timing, hosting, and organisation of this feedback event.

The Council Working Party on General Affairs at its informal meeting in Prague on 22 September held a discussion on these key issues and arrived at the following:

Guiding principle

Citizens-focused. The event is not a continuation of the COFE structures, it should not be a rerun of the Conference plenary, it is a sui generis event for the institutions to talk with citizens, not with other stakeholders. Some delegations raised the usefulness of having other stakeholders (e.g. civil society, social partners, CoR) present, but overall sense was that presence should be limited and not to overshadow citizens in either number, or focus and could be in observer mode-only.

Venue

Clear support for the European Commission hosting the hybrid event. Possibility of visiting the Council building(s) was seen positively.

Mode

Hybrid mode stressed to ensure true inclusiveness for citizens given rising prices, timing and potential resurgence of Covid. Public streaming should be ensured.

Format

General support for a multi-part approach. Avoid sequence of interventions, with the potential of increasing to increase the interactiveness by holding 1/ a session where institutions report to the citizens, 2/ breakaway sessions for citizens to discuss amongst themselves and not with the institutions or other stakeholders (these could perhaps be where the Council provides an additional venue in the Council buildings), 3/ a feedback session where citizens respond to the institution's report.

Inclusiveness

Overall support for a lean structure, with high level representation of the three institutions. Overall support for Presidency to represent the Council. Other institutions should be likewise represented by a single person at a high level so as to not flood the venue. Should more representatives be present, then an online presence can be envisaged, perhaps in observer mode. Nevertheless, the three institutions should each have one speaker at a high level who speaks for the institution as a whole.

Communication

A joint communication strategy should be developed and launched as soon as possible. Need clear messages, need to show some sense of unity. The follow-up and the event should not provide a forum for institutions to launch attacks on each other.

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Since this discussion has taken place, several new factors have entered into the debate, including a renewed appeal of the European Parliament to host the event with a focus on in-person attendance.

It is the opinion of the Presidency that at a time of soaring energy prices with potentially profound negative impacts on households and businesses during coming winter, the potential of resurgence of the Covid-19 and a war in our immediate neighbourhood, it becomes all the more important to ensure a balanced approach to the organisation of this event in order to ensure cost-effectiveness and a focus on enabling citizens' participation. As such, **the Presidency is of the view that both a later and/or online-only format** of the feedback event could better serve to safeguard costs and ensure an equal participation for those citizens who cannot travel to Brussels in early December, so as not to create an event that favours the attendance of institutions and citizens already located in Brussels.

In this context the Presidency asks delegations to answer the following questions:

1. Timing: Does your delegation agree with the Presidency's proposal to suggest moving the date of the Feedback event until spring, or is there a preference for the event to take place in early December as originally proposed?
2. Mode: Is an in-person, hybrid or digital-only mode for the Conference preferable by your delegation?
3. Venue: In case of in-person or hybrid form of the event, what is your delegation's preferred venue considering also the European Parliament's offer to host the event?
4. Format: Should the event be citizen-focused with a limited participation of European institutions, or should the event copy previous Conference formats?
