



for the Conference on
the Future of Europe

EUROPE AND ITS NEXT STEPS:

ALDA for the
CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE



Citizens, Equality, Rights
and Values programme



TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION I: THE VISION	2
THE MISSION WITHIN THE CONFERENCE	2
a) A bottom-up approach for Europe	2
b) The importance of citizens' participation	5
c) ALDA General Assembly: the coordinate effort for the CoFoE	8

SECTION II: THE CIVIL SOCIETY	9
REPRESENTING THE CSOs AT EUROPEAN LEVEL: THE ROLE OF ALDA WITHIN THE CIVIL SOCIETY CONVENTION ON THE CoFoE	9

SECTION III: THE NETWORK	14
ANIMATING THE NETWORK AND THE MEMBERS	14
a) The toolkit for the ALDA's members	14
b) Localising the Conference: SEI meeting in Thiene	16
c) #ALDATAALK: the conclusion of the CoFoE	17
THE OBJECTIVES OF THE CoFoE WITHIN ALDA'S WORKING GROUPS	19
a) Working Group on CSO & Private Sector	20
b) Working Group on Democracy & Local Development	20
c) Working Group on Digitalisation	21
d) Working Group on Eastern Partnership	22
e) Working Group on Environment	22

SECTION IV: BEYOND THE CONFERENCE	24
a) Final phase: time to reflect on citizens' contribution	24
b) ALDA at the closing ceremony	25
c) ALDA as a bridge between Western Balkans and the CoFoE	26

SECTION V: CONCLUSION	29
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SECTION I: THE VISION

1. THE MISSION WITHIN THE CONFERENCE

a) A bottom-up approach for Europe

In this era of ever changing geopolitics, Europe's role in **Citizens Participation and Participatory Democracy** becomes even more important. Hence, this becomes evident within the European Commission's six priorities for the 2019-2024 period, among which the goal "new push for European democracy" stands out. Europe is a leading actor in democracy around the world, and is facing different challenges at the same time: the rise of populism, Brexit and its consequences, not to mention the Covid-19 pandemic.

The European Parliament elections in May 2019 was an event feared by many due to the possible destabilising effects of the Union. However, it had in their results, only partially, and on the surface, averted risks and fears still widespread on the various fronts of sovereign and/or populist anti-Europeanism.

Sovereignties that intersect with populisms and forcefully bring out a functional and identity crisis that not only tend to obscure the cultural characteristics and the polity of the EU, but also produce new political actors (*movements and parties*). The latter reject modernity and refer to particularistic visions of the interests of the nation-states, without taking into account social, economic and political phenomena in their global significance and planetary.



Having that in mind, the European Union is often described as a distant and inaccessible institution. Yet, how far is this perception real? According to a Eurobarometer survey, around 44% of participants do not trust EU institutions¹.

1. Standard Eurobarometer Survey 96 - Winter 2021-2022, available at <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2553>

Hence, in order to foster this last data, it is fundamental that institutions keep communicating on the countless possibilities offered to the European citizens. The latter, should be more aware of the many tools and opportunities they have to be actively involved in European politics and influence the work of the institutions, starting from the municipal level until the transnational one: the guide to active European citizenship is an example².

In addition, from a general perspective, in recent years the European institutions have worked hard to promote openness, transparency and information on their work. These general principles are also confirmed in article 10.3 of the Lisbon Treaty according to which ***“every citizen has the right to participate in the democratic life of the Union. Decisions are taken as openly and as close to citizens as possible.”***³

In light of this, and in order to narrow down the gap perceived between the institutions and the European citizens, **in May 2021, the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission launched the Conference on the future of Europe, a real experiment in participatory democracy aimed at encouraging the participation of European citizens in defining the future of the Union.**

The time has come to reinvent the link between EU citizens and institutions and, in general, to reduce the representation gap in modern democracies. An empowered civil society is a crucial component of any democratic system and an asset in itself. Thus, a dialogue with local CSOs is crucial, but for it to be meaningful, it must be timely, structured and transparent; it is important that the dialogue covers a broad variety of CSOs from the local to the national levels, comprising urban and rural organisations.

Indeed, to ensure a sustainable future for the Union, citizens must be placed at the centre of its political dynamic, regaining ownership of their representation through greater participation and deliberation.

The EU needs greater openness to civil society, to the development of a transnational public opinion, direct contact with citizens, openness which should promote the identification of citizens with the EU.

2. Example of a quick guide to active European citizenship available at <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/eptac/en/quickguide-to-active-citizenship.html>

3. Treaty on the European Union, art. 10, 2016 available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A12016M010>

A bottom-up approach is required, together with the involvement of all levels of government: local, regional and national. An essential element of this approach is the promotion and development of civil society.

Article 11 of the EU Treaty recognises participatory democracy as a fundamental democratic principle and calls for the creation of a meaningful dialogue with civil society.⁴ Therefore, civil dialogue is needed to make our societies better by ensuring civil society organisations' consultation by decision-makers when taking decisions concerning the groups they represent. Nevertheless, the participation of CSOs in a structured dialogue with the EU institutions should be increased and improved.

At-present, consultation of civil society organisations depends on the goodwill of the EU institutions. A truly open, transparent and regular civil dialogue at both EU and national level would strengthen legitimacy, accountability and efficiency of policy-making.



4. Treaty on the European Union, art. 11.2, 2016 available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A12016M011>

Within this context, ALDA fits in with its commitment as a Civil Society Organisation to push for a [bottom-up democratic approach](#), bringing Europe closer to its citizens and making it more inclusive, participative and sustainable. In order to do that, the European decision-making process should take into consideration one key player: the people. In order to achieve this, it is fundamental that the EU institutions and civil society engage in a purposeful and participatory dialogue, with the common goal of shaping policies on the basis of real experiences. Therefore, the importance of civil dialogue needs to be recognised institutionally at EU level, and ALDA works towards this goal.

b) [The importance of citizens' participation](#)

On May 9th 2021, on “Europe Day”, took place the opening session of the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) in the European Parliament in Strasbourg, though in hybrid format. It represented an important step in the democratic process of the European Union for what concerns the engagement of citizens in the political processes. The CoFoE represents a chance for all European citizens to engage and debate on policies, goals, and processes that Europe should work on in the future. The idea behind this initiative is to have the European Parliament, Council, and Commission on the same table with civil society in order to debate and listen to it when drawing proposals on Europe’s issues.

With this goal in mind, people are allowed and encouraged to actively participate in the Conference, within different topic-centred events and conferences, but also tools, such as the [multilingual digital platform](#), which was active during the whole Conference: it gives every EU citizen the chance to participate in any of the 24 official EU languages; citizens can put forward their ideas, endorse other people's ideas and comment on them. It also is the place where people could share information on Conference events and report on their outcomes.

All contributions collected are then analysed and used as input into the work of the [European Citizens Panels](#), the [Conference Plenary](#). Apart from sharing ideas, citizens could organise events, save the ones already accessible at the [participatory space online](#).

Moreover, panels for citizen participation have been set up by the European Commission, in order to connect representatives with similar citizens' age, socioeconomic background, gender and origins, that will meet regularly and provide ideas to the Conference Plenary.

The focus of the whole Conference has been to give citizens the possibility to propose⁴ the **EUROPE they WANT**.

This is also the goal of ALDA within the CoFoE, to give everyone the opportunity to raise its voice; while shaping the Europe that each wants. ALDA gave people the opportunity to be part of the Conference, by raising your voice and the voices of citizens to make Europe the one they want.



The challenges and problems to be tackled are many and diverse, and this event is only a starting point. Within the many ideas at stake, the Conference addressed some key topics, such as:

- Climate change and environment
- Health
- A stronger economy, social justice and jobs
- The European Union stronger in the world
- Values, rights, rule of law and security
- Digital transformation
- European democracy
- Migration
- Education, culture, youth and sport

In this framework, ALDA suggested to its network, friends and followers different modalities to join the CoFoE, depending on who was interested - be they Local Authority, CSO, or citizen. In the first two cases, the opportunity envisaged by ALDA was to join a Working Group; while citizens could have been part of consultations. An example of ALDA's commitment is marked by the organisation of a series of events and initiatives with the support of its networks, such as the [European Movement International](#), the [European Movement Italy](#), the [European Movement France](#) and the [European Federalist Movement of Italy](#).

All in all, the Conference represented a concrete occasion to restart, to improve and to strengthen Europe together with its citizens, and ALDA facilitated this linkage.

Overall, [ALDA's involvement in the Conference](#) has been intensive and important, also in light of its participation as a member of the **Civil Society Convention of European Civil Society Organisations** coordinated by Civil Society (CSO) Europe. Not to mention that ALDA's Secretary General Antonella Valmorbidia is an elected member of the Steering Committee. In addition, based on the different topics to be addressed by the Conference, thematic clusters have been created, and ALDA participated in the organised activities, as it will be illustrated in section II.

c) ALDA General Assembly: the coordinate effort for the CoFoE

As said in the previous paragraph, ALDA actively took part in the Conference; however, its involvement went beyond that, in order to advocate for citizens' participation. Let's consider how. ALDA General Assembly is an annual meeting of the staff, Governing Board, members, and friends, to share the results and achievements of the Association⁴ while discussing future steps and strategies. During the 2021 General Assembly, one of the main objectives targeted was the CoFoE, and the role of ALDA therein.

Taking into consideration ALDA's mission as an association promoting democracy and citizens' engagement, the General Assembly 2021 contributed to increase people participation and members gathering; while bringing issues discussed at local level to the European one.

ALDA played a leading role not only within the Conference, but also in the network of CSOs, and with its members. The first meeting of the Working Groups, whose fields of interest reflect the main objectives of the CoFoE, found place in the General Assembly 2021 as will be described in [Section III](#).

SECTION II: THE CIVIL SOCIETY

2. REPRESENTING THE CSOs AT EUROPEAN LEVEL: THE ROLE OF ALDA WITHIN THE CIVIL SOCIETY CONVENTION ON THE CoFoE

As mentioned in the previous section, the milestones on which the Association has been based since 2000, are solid enough to guide ALDA at international level. Thus, the latter played a key role in the development of the Civil Society Convention on the Conference on the Future of Europe (CSOCoFoE). Yet, before analysing this democratic exercise, let's take a step back to further investigate the root of it and its very beginning.

As also stated in [article 11 of the Treaty on the European Union](#), ***“the institutions shall, by appropriate means, give citizens and representative associations the opportunity to make known and publicly exchange their views in all areas of Union action”*** Furthermore, they ***“shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with representative associations and civil society”***⁵. Therefore, in light of this, the Organisations representing the civil society gather together not only to serve as a bridge among citizens and institutions; but also to function as supervisors assuring that actions and measures taken at institutional level will be coherent and in line with the wishes and needs of people.

With great motivation, and backed by its very own mission, ***“Civil Society Europe”*** launched the Civil Society Convention, addressed to all European organisations, ***“working towards regenerating the European project around the shared values of Equality, Solidarity, Inclusiveness and Democracy”***. This Convention marked one of the first steps of ALDA within the CoFoE.

5. Treaty on the European Union, art. 11, 2016 available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A12016M011>

Already in January 2022, together with more than 50 CSOs, the [Association signed the “Joint Civil Society Declaration”](#), thus stressing its concrete commitment to the cause. As stated in the Declaration, the will behind this document is clear: **“as European wide networks of civil society organisations representing citizens and people living on EU territory, we want, in coordination with our national members, to be closely involved in the Conference, but also in its agenda-setting, priorities, as well as in the follow up”**⁶.

Reconnecting people with institutions, bridging them together: this was, and still is the role of the CSOs within this European context.

Therefore, on 3 February 2021, at the eve of the Conference, ALDA was among the Civil Society Organisations joining the meeting on the **Launch of the Civil Society Convention on the Future of Europe**, thus marking the beginning of this common effort and action throughout the 2021-2022. Further proactive actions took place, on 4 March 2021, when ALDA’s Secretary General - Ms. Antonella Valmorbidia - was elected [Member of the Steering Committee](#), in charge of the lead of the thematic clusters, focusing on environment, democracy, social equality just to mention a few.

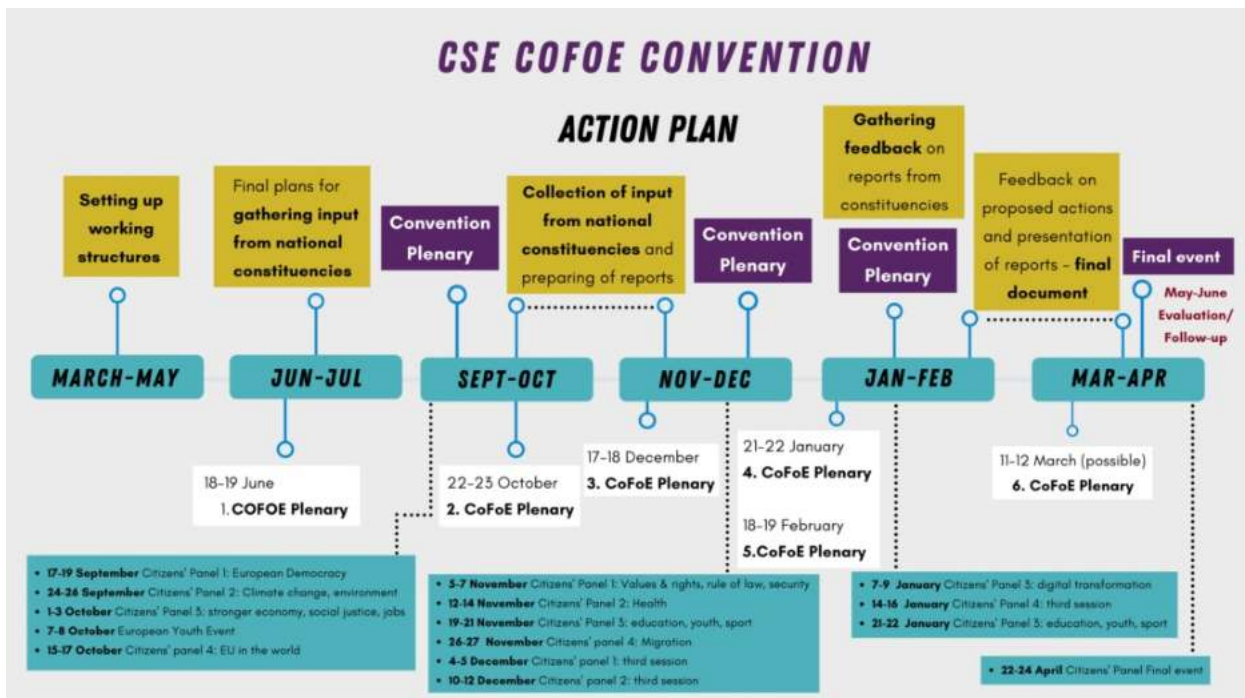


Image from [Civil Society Europe website](#)

6. Civil Society Europe, “Joint Civil Society Declaration”, 2021 available at <https://civilsocietyeurope.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Joint-Civil-Society-Declaration.pdf>

Hence, as stressed by Jean Marc Roirant, President of the Civil Society Europe (CSE), **“only civil society organisations can make EU institutions and national governments accountable for a truly participative and democratic conference, but also for its follow up through policy, legislative and if needed Treaty change”**.

Based and guided by the words of CSE President, the agenda of the CSOCOfoE was tight and full of initiatives, both targeting the local realities, and towards the institutions.

From a general point of view, five clusters were created, strictly related to the priorities and pillars of the European Union; thus, allowing the representative of the civil society to turn the inputs, gathered through the surveys, into recommendations to the CoFoE; lately shared with the institutions at the dedicated sessions.

ALDA, for its part, led the thematic cluster on democracy, thus spreading a dedicated **thematic survey**, together with ECOLISE, on “the Union’s democratic foundations, and how to strengthen democratic processes governing the European Union – To make Europe a citizens’ project”. The aim was to scrutinise people’s engagement, while calling for involvement and participation to guarantee a high qualitative social development.



Specifically, the answers collected may be summarised in three main aspects:

- participatory democracy;
- electoral reform and
- accountability assurance.⁷

The former especially highlighted that the tools, considered as the most useful, are in person consultations, direct engagement with MEPs, voting, and citizen councils; targeting - among the others - fundamental rights, climate action, disinformation and rule of law.

7. Civil Society Europe, “Thematic cluster”, May 2022 available at <https://civilsocietyeurope.eu/civil-society-convention-on-the-future-of-europe/thematic-clusters/>

Furthermore, even though the majority believed that Europe is democratic, still there are obstacles and difficulties, also due to the institutional complexity, that challenges the participation.

Concerning electoral reform, a slight majority of respondents supported the idea of having transnational lists of candidates from all the European countries.

Finally, concerning the third aspect, accountability assurance, if on the one hand, is guaranteed by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights; on the other hand still faces some shortcomings, which mine the democratic apparatus; Among them: corruption and populism.

All things considered, the highest percentage of respondents were asking for more inclusive and accessible elections, also in terms of information-sharing; debates and news on this subject; without forgetting the need to facilitate people with different abilities.

Overall, this holistic democratic exercise brought great results, such as the allocation of five seats (*out of eight*) dedicated to civil society in the Plenary Session of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

By granting this visibility at the Plenary Session, the institutions, in fact, through the CoFoE, further strengthened and underlined the key role of civil society as a representative of the citizens' voice. The latter found its natural echo in the CSOCOfoE, which has been able to reach millions of people, thanks to meetings, initiatives and ***ad-hoc*** events. This synergy with citizens culminated both in the Convention recommendations and in the **4th Plenary, held on 11-12 March 2022** in Strasbourg. Ms. Valmorbidia joined it, thus bringing the voices of thousands of people to the institutions and policy-makers.

Generally speaking, at the Plenary, the Convention shared the recommendations, based on the surveys previously mentioned, and outlined on the following topics:

1. Climate Change and Environmental Challenges (*led by Green 10*);
2. Social Europe (*led by Solidar*);
3. Digital Transformation (*led by ECAS*);
4. The life in Europe, with a focus on rights and values (*led by CEV*);
5. Democracy and the Rule of Law (*led by ALDA with ECOLISE*)

The 4th Plenary was also the perfect setting, allowing the Association to emphasise the need for Europe to firmly guarantee and protect the European space as a place of democracy and respect of human rights. There is, furthermore, the necessity to improve the consultation mechanism; while providing an answer to the lack of trust among citizens and institutions.

Thanks to its participation within the Civil Society Convention on the CoFoE, ALDA further stressed its role as a strategic partner in advocating on democracy in Europe and on people's rights.



Image from [ALDA at the 4 plenary of the CoFoE](#)

SECTION III: THE NETWORK

3. ANIMATING THE NETWORK AND THE MEMBERS

If the previous section was dedicated to the commitment outside the Association, and with other Organisations, this third part, on the contrary, focuses on the effort that ALDA has made in terms of animating and sensitising the network's awareness on the Conference on the Future of Europe.

Members are at the core of ALDA's actions, not only in terms of engagement within the projects, but also in terms of budget allocation. Hence, as estimated in the latest financial report, 55% of the total budget has been invested for the development of the Local Democracy Agencies, as well as Local Authorities or Civil Society Organisations; in other words: ALDA network and members.



In line with the overall strategy specifically implemented for the empowerment of the network, ALDA, also in its commitment for the Conference on the Future of Europe, has defined a series of meetings and events, both online and offline, to stimulate and provide concrete tools to its members, allowing them to join the Conference and contribute to the Europe of tomorrow.

a) The toolkit for the ALDA's members

As one of the benefits of subscribing for the membership, on 24 September 2022, ALDA together with the [European Partnership for Democracy](#), organised a meeting, [exclusively open to its members](#).

With the idea of fostering interaction and participation, while boosting this bottom-up exercise of democracy, the meeting was aimed at stressing the importance of actively involving different actors; be they citizens, stakeholders or research centres; all interested in Europe, to shape the future of it.

Having that in mind, and benefitting from the “Multilingual Digital Platform”, citizens and/or organisations could organise events, join one or share ideas. This latter aspect consisted of engaging in virtual discussion and debates with other European citizens on different topics, close to people’s interest. More in depth, each single person could, in fact, start a debate on environment, social issues or any subject related to European policies, and share their idea, while reading someone else’s perspective and opinion as well. Similarly, events were meant to pursue the same cause: **increasing inclusiveness and transparency of this democratic experiment, narrowing the gap between people and institutions.**

With the #TheFutureisYours and #CoFoE not only Ms. [Suica, European Commission Vice-President](#), but also CSOs, politicians, people, experts and ALDA, of course, have used these communicative hashtags to spread the word and increase participation. As a matter of fact, in order to entice young generations to join the Conference, a great and coordinated use of social media, to inform about events organised on the Platform, was also wished.

Hence, if on the one hand this exercise was meant to be a bottom-up one; from people to institutions; on the other hand it also had to be transversal among generations: the ideas and opinions of youths were at the centre of the CoFoE.

Associations, such as ALDA, which claim a wide and heterogeneous network not only are able to serve as a bridge among parties, but also are able to get closer to young people and include them in the building-making process of the Europe of tomorrow: the one they will experience the most.

b) Localising the Conference: SEI meeting in Thiene

Not only online events, but also in presence. While the COVID restrictions were easing down, allowing more opportunities to organise offline events, on 6 September 2021 the **European Intermunicipal Service (SEI)** launched a meeting on the Conference on the Future of Europe and the annexed presentation of the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027.

The Council Chamber of the Town Hall of Thiene (Vicenza - Italy) hosted the event, conducted by ALDA and ALDA+, ALDA's Benefit Company, which has been working for over 20 years in favour of local realities in Italy and across Europe, promoting the active participation of citizens and helping administrations and associations to access the funding tools offered by the European Union, and beyond.

Addressed to the municipalities located in the north area of Vicenza province, and active in SEI; among them Breganze, Marano Vicentino, Villaverla, Zugliano as well as the Municipality of Malo, the meeting saw the participation of many Local Authorities' delegated and elected representatives.



Generally speaking, Antonella Valmorbida - Secretary General of ALDA - provided a comprehensive overview not only on the meaning and importance of the Conference per se, but also on the unique opportunity for citizens from all over Europe to exploit this occasion to freely express opinions and suggestions that will shape European priorities in the coming years.

The latter are also the bulk laying at the basis of the New Multiannual Financial Framework of the European Union, focus of the speech held by Marco Boaria, Director of Programmes & Development Department of ALDA and CEO of ALDA+.

During the meeting, participants discussed the challenges posed, starting from the perspective of Local Authorities and Municipalities; while underlining the importance of scheduling training sessions to acquire information about the new programming, in order to plan the SEI's project activities in the coming months, for example.

Initiatives such as this one are clear examples of how to localise the CoFoE, getting it closer to the communities and its citizens.

c) [#ALDATALK: the conclusion of the CoFoE](#)

Among the ways to intensify the relation with members, the Association has planned, in the past years, ad hoc meetings, entitled #ALDATalk. Aimed at tackling specific objectives, also suggested by the network, on 24th June 2022, the Association hosted a talk dedicated to the conclusions of the Conference on the Future of Europe. A great number of people attended the online event, eager to better understand the next step, as well as the results achieved so far.



Touching upon different aspects of the CoFoE, ALDA Secretary General Ms. Antonella Valmorbida illustrated the involvement of ALDA in the process, thus highlighting the role played by the members.

Similarly, Alexandrina Najmowicz, Secretary General of the [European Civic Forum](#) (FCE) and co-chair of the Civil Society Convention for the Conference on the Future of Europe, stressed the role of the CSOs, while urging, from a general standpoint, a higher involvement of civil society in decision-making. Following the lines of the first two speakers, also Hervé Moritz, Vice-Président [Le Mouvement Européen – France](#) Alsace and Spokesperson, Union of European Federalists – France (UEF), focused on the local contribution to the CoFoE. Hence, based on the Convention Citoyenne sur l'Europe held in Strasbourg, he stressed the key role of empowerment of the citizens; as well as the necessity to give them a sense of impact into policy-making.

From a general perspective, all speakers agreed on the importance of monitoring the follow up to the Conference on the Future of Europe from the EU institutions.

4. THE OBJECTIVES OF THE CoFoE WITHIN ALDA'S WORKING GROUPS

Within the core elements and activities of the CoFoE, the Conference Plenary included nine Working Groups dedicated to the different topics. Similarly, ALDA structured the Working Groups on the same themes, in line with the Conference ones. Overall, thanks to the various meetings some concrete outputs and conclusions have been drawn, as described below.

Members' participation and active involvement are two cornerstones of ALDA's work and the basis of its strength and added value. The Association takes tangible actions, and relaunches its democratic life every four years, with the appointment of the Governing Board, who activated immediately the new Working Groups (WG), both thematic and geographic ones.



Image from: ALDA archive and General Assembly 2022

a) Working Group on CSO & Private Sector

The Working Group on CSO and the private sector met and discussed the improvement of the connection between CSOs and the private sector, and the related challenges, such as the lack of networking activities, and lack of legislation thereabout. Different participants, from various countries, highlighted the same concerns, meaning the distance between the two sectors and the lack of decentralisation.

Among the solutions that emerged, one can find: sharing good practices collected from past projects could be the right starting point; a bottom-up and multi-stake approach is also desirable to overcome the issue; not to mention the idea to create councils that could bring together the different stakeholders. All these proposals and ideas are totally in line with the debates that took place during the Conference itself, as the one Online Platform.

b) Working Group on Democracy & Local Development

The Working Group on Democracy and Local Development reflected the efforts within the Conference's European Citizens' Panel 'European democracy / Values and rights, rule of law, security'. Indeed, in the context of ALDA-organised meeting, the group started by discussing the general definitions of local development, as promoting a multistakeholder approach, localising Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with the support of citizens and local stakeholders; and local democracy, in the sense of boosting citizens' participation at the local level, with particular attention to vulnerable groups.

This could be done through inputs from the citizens on how to boost democracy, in order to achieve SDG; making people's voices heard and involved in their community; and responding locally to global issues, thus including citizens in the decision-making process locally. Participants shared their experiences, coming from different backgrounds:

- In Belgium there are advisory boards of citizens for local policy makers, thus creating actions to promote local development within the framework of the SDGs;
- People from Montenegro shared their input on citizens' meetings and similar good practices, which are fundamental;
- Finally, representatives from Portugal explained a participatory tool that integrates children and young people, that allows them to give proposals on how to improve their community.

The different ideas that emerged were compelling. Hence, supporting democracy, citizens' participation, sustainable local development and good governance has been at the core of ALDA's mission since the very beginning.

c) Working Group on Digitalisation

The last years have shown an increased use of technologies and virtual participation. In this process addressing the future of citizens participation, Civil Society organisations, Local Authorities and Institutional actors should cooperate in paving the way to an include development of new forms of participation and means of information able to guarantee a democratic, inclusive and informed participation.

In this sense, digital transformation is a challenge and, at the same time, an opportunity. Therefore, using digital tools in a meaningful way to help citizens, with a democratic and inclusive approach, is paramount.

During the CoFoE, citizens asked that European legislation adapts to digitalisation, also in line with the events of the last 3 years that shook Europe and the world, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. As mentioned in the Conference Final Report, ***“Europe must become a world leader and standard setter in digital transformation and charter a European way to build an ethical, human-centred, transparent and safe digital society”***.⁸

In light of this, ALDA has a **Working Group on Digitalisation**, through which it wants to develop and support best-practices exchange, while ensuring a democratic and inclusive use of digital means of participation.

During the WG meeting at the Conference, participants shared experiences on digitalisation of cultural heritage, digital capacity building, and creating digital tools with the help of citizens, in order not to leave people behind in this process. Various ideas emerged as to how to reach the digitalisation goal, such as promoting Digital Nomads (people who work online in various locations, rather than a fixed business location), investing in R&D, and increasing capacity building, with the involvement of different generations in the capacity building processes on digitalisation.

8. https://cor.europa.eu/en/Documents/CoFE_Report_with_annexes_EN.pdf

d) Working Group on Eastern Partnership

The COVID-19 pandemic is a powerful reminder that Europe can only tackle global challenges through cooperation. Together, it is possible to address the critical issues such as peace and security, climate change, sustainable development and the global recovery. The Eastern Partnership is a decentralised cooperation between Europe and the Eastern partnership countries, such as Georgia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and it should follow an inclusive and multi-stakeholder approach, towards a mutual partnership in order to develop fair and inclusive local communities that relies on rule of law, freedom of expression, media freedom and participatory democratic values.



During the Conference on the Future of Europe, ALDA held a meeting through the **Working Group on Eastern Partnership**, and the discussion revolved around the state-of-art of the current situation in the area at stake, and the relation with the EU and its policies.

The general attitude that emerged was the will to increase people participation in policy-making processes and how to achieve it. Some ideas have been proposed within this regard: one is to boost decentralised cooperation in the region; another consists of sharing best practices among project partners is another powerful tool; and, finally, working on joint projects focused on good local governance.

e) Working Group on Environment

The fight against climate change is an urgent issue for the European Union and across the globe. A strategy is needed, where Europe can continue leading the world on a path to sustainability and climate neutrality. In an effort to reach this goal, CSOs should be strong actors in raising awareness of citizens on climate change and environmental sustainability, boosting for a more sustainable future towards all their actions, and approaching the green transition pushing for a participatory process.

Within the Conference's objectives and topics, environment was central in the debate; therefore, ALDA set up the meeting of the Working Group on environment. The group

discussed the challenges related to it, such as the rehabilitation of rural areas, improving the connection between rural and urban areas, improving capacity building of local authorities within this domain, and preserving cultural heritage.

During the meeting, participants shared their experiences, with particular focus on: sustainable agri-food systems, examples on how to get the most from projects under the LIFE programme, and improving the circular economy. Last but not least participants concentrated on schools, education and urban farming.

Outputs from the meeting were diverse, such as creating a new Building Information Modelling (BIM) European Strategy, which serves as the foundation for collaboration throughout the whole lifecycle based on smart digital models of built assets. Other ideas consisted on organising events and campaigns to raise awareness, involving students and kids in environmental activities, and finally boosting the circular economy, as previously emerged.

SECTION IV: BEYOND THE CONFERENCE

5. FINAL PHASE: TIME TO REFLECT ON CITIZENS' CONTRIBUTION

During the months of the CoFoE, as one of the most unprecedented events, more than **44 000 participants** joined the online platform, while more than 45 000 attended events, both online and offline. Moreover, people shared more than 14 000 ideas and 19 000 comments, thanks to which the European institutions can gather information on people's expectations and wishes for the future of Europe. This has been done through a structure, made up of European citizens' panels, Conference plenaries and much more. All these initiatives now came to an end, and it is time to sum everything up.

In February 2022 the online Platform closed, and afterwards some citizens gathered for the **Panel on EU in the world and migration**, hosted by the European Institute of Public Administration and Studio Europa in Maastricht, (The Netherlands). During this occasion, citizens concluded their recommendations, related to the EU's objectives on humanitarian aid, cooperation, migration, security defence and much more. As already mentioned, apart from this, there have been other panels where citizens gathered to discuss.

During the whole Conference, ALDA participated by encouraging its members to join the platform and be active therein, through the organisation of webinars specifically for them. Not to mention that, benefitting from ALDA's role in the Steering Committee of the CSOCOfoE, the Secretary General of ALDA, Ms. Valmorbida joined the Conference Plenary in March 2022.

This closing round of initiatives further represented a moment to highlight the importance of citizens' participation and engagement in the European life, as a useful tool to reduce the gap within this bottom-up approach of policy-making, and to underlined the fundamental role of Civil Society Organisations, such as ALDA in reaching these objectives.

6. ALDA AT THE CLOSING CEREMONY

One year later from the launch, on May 9th 2022, again on Europe Day, the closing ceremony of the Conference on the Future of Europe took place, and Antonella Valmorbidia, Secretary General of ALDA, together with the staff from the office in Strasbourg, were invited to take part. As has been said in the previous sections, ALDA actively participated in this bottom-up approach, through the Civil Society Convention of the Conference on the Future of Europe, and through the different events and meetings.



Image from: ALDA at the closing event on 9 May 2022

The goal of the CoFoE was to bring citizens together and closer to the EU institutions and their policy-making processes, similarly to what ALDA does in its everyday work, being citizen participation and engagement one of its core values. This debate held with citizens resulted in a report, collecting 49 proposals and more than 320 recommendations that the EU institutions should follow when taking decisions on the nine previously mentioned topics, in order to reform the EU.

During the closing ceremony, the President of the European Parliament Roberta Metsola, President Emmanuel Macron as the European Council President, and the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen were handed this report.

President Metsola said: ***"Citizens - especially young people - are at the heart of our vision for the future of Europe. They have directly shaped the outcome of the Conference. We are at a defining moment of European integration and no suggestion for change should be off-limits. We should not be afraid to unleash the power of Europe to change people's lives for the better."***

During 2021 and beginning of 2022, the Conference became a truly open forum to discuss the Europe, which people want to live in. It enabled a transparent, inclusive and structured debate with European citizens about the issues that are relevant to them and for their future.

The natural question that stems from this exchange is how politicians at EU level, and not only, will follow up on these proposals in an effective way, within the framework of the Treaties. Within this regard, some questions will find an answer during the event in Autumn 2022, during which citizens will be updated and given feedback.

Once again, ALDA will be present to follow the process of ensuring citizens' participation to reduce the gap between people and the institutions; it will be doing so with the network of Civil Society Organisations and European partners.

7. ALDA AS A BRIDGE BETWEEN THE WESTERN BALKANS AND THE CoFoE

If on the one hand actors involved are apprehensively waiting for the event scheduled for the Autumn 2022; on the other hand how far have the neighbouring countries been taken into consideration within the CoFoE?



Image from: ALDA event in Trieste on March 2022

As among the main pillars of ALDA, as well as its field of action, the Association has great expertise and knowledge on the local situation. Benefitting from the work done by several Local Democracy Agencies located in the area, the ALDA office in Skopje and the presence of experts within the Governing Board of ALDA, the latter further set itself as the missing link not only among citizens and institutions, but also among Europe and its Neighbours.

Starting from a holistic approach, inspired by the Agenda 2030 principle of “Leave no One Behind”, while implementing the aim of the Strategy for the Western Balkans (WB), which is meant to support cooperation and EU integration processes in the region as well

as to promote local democracy and citizens participation as a precondition for local sustainable development; [ALDA addressed a series of recommendations to the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council.](#)

Conceived within the Conference entitled “European Union and the Western Balkans: Towards Renewed Trust” organised by the project [Regional Youth Compact for Europe](#) (RYCE), professional and experts seized the opportunity to reflect and debate on the loopholes that prevent the full participation of the Western Balkans countries in this democratic experiment.

No better occasion than the RYCE meeting to elaborate on the CoFoE. Hence, the project itself is specifically designed to support and enhance the participation of Civil Society Organisations in policy-design and in monitoring the process of EU integration in the WB, while engaging youth to participate more actively in this process.

By issuing these recommendations, ALDA further stressed its commitment to further integrate the involvement; and assure the cooperation among Western Balkans and Europe, also responding to the aspirations of many WB Countries to join the Union.



Image from: [Balkan Network for Democracy website](#)

Overview on the recommendations

Number	Detail
1	Continue support for the integration of the countries of Western Balkans to the European Union as a process of democratisation, stabilisation and peace for the countries and communities in the region and for the EU member States.
2	Contribute to further involvement of the youth from the Western Balkans in addressing key challenges such as socio-economic development of the region, democratic transformation in the WB countries and demographic changes.
3	Promote and develop cooperation between civil society and local authorities as an important tool for creating effective models in fostering European integration in the Western Balkans.
4	Fostering and engaging in strengthening regional cooperation, reconciliation and good neighbourhood relations reaffirms the EU commitment of the WB countries and the EU members states.
5	Continue the cooperation between the EU and the Western Balkans countries on the issue of migration, migration management and migrant's inclusion.
6	Maintain the EU support, partnership and solidarity by reinforcing the cooperation in different fields such as health, economy and digitalization in order to reduce the negative socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis in the Western Balkans countries.
7	Establish various lines of cooperation in addressing climate change and in implementing energy transition.

SECTION V: CONCLUSION

Based on all the above-mentioned, the commitment of ALDA within the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe, can be summarised as follows: from the one hand it was marked by an intense work done with other Civil Society Organisations, starting from the signature of the Civil Society Convention on the CoFoE, to the participation at different conferences and debates. On the other hand, great energy has been spent for the members and network of ALDA by delivering ad hoc #ALDATalks and by designing five specific Working Groups tackling punctual objectives at the core of the Conference as well.

As emerged from all the initiatives, ALDA is strongly advocating not only for a closer collaboration between CSOs and institutions but also for a greater citizens' involvement. Hence, the Association will further stress the importance of participatory democracy; while urging for an electoral reform as well as accountability assurance as resulted from the surveys undertaken within the CSOCOfoE.

Furthermore, ALDA will be in the first line in highlighting the necessity of integrating the expectations, needs and position of the neighbouring countries. As clearly stated in the table on page 29, the Association, based on the results of the RYCE meeting, is addressing the Parliament, Council and Commission to take into consideration the seven recommendations specifically targeting the Western Balkan regions.

Finally, ALDA is very much in favour of this bottom-up democratic approach, and it congratulates all the institutions, organisations, partners and members which also actively participated in the CoFoE. By its tireless efforts, the Association marked, once again, its position as a strategic and reliable player both within the Union and with the neighbouring countries, always committed to increasing the democratic surrounding in which everyone is living.