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Report: Conference on the Future of Europe

Views from Romanian citizens



March 2022

Report: The Conference on the Future of Europe
Views from Romanian citizens

(April 2021 – March 2022)

Bucharest, March 2022

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Executive summary

“The future of the European Union must be based on a unified approach that supports the culture of dialogue, solidarity and cooperation” - this idea was stated in one of the events organised by the European Institute of Romania (EIR), from April 2021 to March 2022. The idea also reflects, in a comprehensive manner, the national debates held in Romania over the last year to offer the Romanian citizens the opportunity to engage in the Conference on the Future of Europe and to promote the European spirit and values.

Over the past year, many events have taken place in Romania, covering a broad thematic area, focusing on priority fields of debate identified within/in the framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe. Each event has contributed to increasing the awareness of the Romanian public about the latest developments in the European sphere, providing citizens with the opportunity to participate in the debate on major European themes/issues/topics and to freely express their views and expectations with regard to the directions of the European project.

Thus, Romanian citizens expressed their views on the following topics: digitalisation and digital transformation, climate change and environment, sustainable mobility, economic recovery, agriculture and sustainable development, social justice and jobs, education, health, European democracy and citizen participation, disinformation, polarisation and populism, the EU in the world and the transatlantic relationship, the EU's engagement for the continuation of its enlargement policy and towards its neighbourhood, resilience and the future of the EU, Romania's contribution to the Conference on the Future of Europe.

The high interest in taking part in the events has enabled the identification of different opinions concerning the positions of Romanian citizens in relation to European policies and strategies, but also on how they see the unified and cohesive future of the European Union, the need for a more resilient European Union, both internally and externally. Thus, the opinions expressed reflected a high and very high degree of optimism concerning the EU's future among young people and a moderate level of optimism among other age groups.

The common concerns expressed by Romanian citizens about the updating of European policies and strategies included multiple references to national specificities and structural vulnerabilities that can influence the achievement of common European goals. For instance, the support for decarbonisation policy cannot be considered without understanding the benefits of the liberalisation of the energy market or without taking into account the broader implications in terms of economic development and competitiveness. The digital transition can bring many benefits to those regions in Romania that act as IT poles, but can be vulnerable to the fragmentation of the digitalisation of public services and to the poor understanding of digital literacy and the development of digital competences among different age groups.

The allocation of European funds to Romania for the financial year 2021-2027 (including through NextGenerationEU) was regarded with both confidence (as they could be used for the modernisation of several public systems) and from the perspective of the need to increase the actual absorption capacity of the available amounts, given that the statistics in the last few years have shown that Romania tends to absorb the available funds towards the end of the programming period. Expectations regarding the National Recovery and Resilience Plan are very high and the participants recommended that EU priorities be seen as Romania's priorities, including to achieve a higher level of European unity and convergence.

As regards **opportunities for Romanian agriculture** in the context of European developments, the high number of small and medium-sized farms that are less vulnerable to crises, the high proportion of the population working in agriculture and the potential for Romania to produce a higher amount of agricultural products were mentioned as positive aspects. Considering the European strategies having an impact on agriculture, a series of challenges were reported with respect to reducing the volume of pesticides, addressing the situation in which yield per hectare would decrease as a result of the application of the rules set out, the need to increase carbon storage capacity and increasing the contribution of agriculture to the supply of ecosystem goods. The discussions highlighted that **the security situation in Ukraine is likely to have a major impact on agriculture**, both in respect of meeting the demand for cereals and nutrients and in terms of economic costs. An interest was noted in supporting **generational change in agriculture, through** young people's (active) engagement.

In the field of **climate change**, the debates pointed out that one of the future crises will be generated by the **social impact of the energy market liberalisation**, which will have a direct impact on Romania. The debates have also revealed the need to **implement the decarbonisation policy, that takes into account the situation of countries like Romania** that also rely on the energy from coal mining. At the same time, citizens believe that, in Romania, **measures are needed to improve air quality**, to protect forests and to promote greening activities.

Education was one of the fields of interest, in which people argued in favour of increasing the involvement of the European Union. Highlighting the specificities of Romania's education system (in particular, rural-urban discrepancies), attention was drawn to the disparities in technological development between countries and the identification of the skills needed for the future labour market. A number of participants shared teachers' need for continuous training/lifelong learning, particularly with the aim of digitalising education and ensuring the continuity of the lessons learned during the pandemic, through the switch to online education.

Participants in the debates also called for enhanced competences for the EU **in the field of health**, using the potential of the current framework of the treaties, given the effects of the pandemic and the need of greater coordination at European level during future crises. It was stressed that the principles of decentralisation, debureaucratisation and dynamization need to be applied to increase the quality of

health services, to attract funds for prevention (measures), and to increase the attractiveness, independence and professionalisation of the medical profession. Last but not least, aspects related to the confidence in the health services should be part of the packages aiming at modernising the national medical infrastructure.

The topics of **European democracy and citizen participation** were often approached jointly with disinformation, populism and illiberal trends. Romanian citizens believe that **the European Union must be united, without fragmentation, multiple or different integration speeds, must act consistently and maintain its response capacity for the benefit of European citizens.**

Warning signals were given about the rise of populist political actors who can undermine confidence in democracy and it has become increasingly clear that the EU needs to support Member States in countering anti-democratic tendencies. Regarding also to the security situation in Ukraine, citizens expect a high level of transparency, accountability and leadership from decision makers.

For the rule-based international order to hold up in the face of illegal, unjustified and unprovoked situations generated by actors of authoritarian regimes, cooperation between the European Union and the United States of America is considered to be a priority, based on shared values and interests. Romania's role in putting on the European agenda issues such as the strengthening of the EU-US relationship, the expertise in the Black Sea area and the call for unity to counter military or hybrid threats in the EU's neighbourhood was brought up several times during the debates.

In light of the recent developments in Ukraine, citizens are also interested in the **resilience of the EU's neighbourhood**. This can be achieved through a strategic commitment, including in the field of security, that will make it clear for the partners in the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership countries that the EU is a guarantor of stability and prosperity, including by continuing the enlargement process.

The discussions showed an interest in **strengthening the relationship between the EU and the USA** in areas such as: economic recovery and sustainable reconstruction worldwide; trade; investments and technological cooperation; promoting green growth; health; promoting multilateralism and strengthening democracy, supporting the continuation of the enlargement policy, the EU-NATO complementarity.

Thus, many citizens believe that the future of the European Union requires the development of multi-sectoral resilience (plans): in the EU's neighbourhood, with regard to digital and cyber systems, health and education systems, agriculture and production chains, security and the internal market, with its fundamental freedoms. Moreover, emphasis was placed on the changes and reforms that we need to put in place to make sure that certain events will not take us by surprise and will not have negative effects on our society.

Finally, Romania's contribution to the Conference on the Future of Europe should also be seen in connection to the development of its own resilience – namely its efforts to promote the European project among the Romanian public – and the advantages

deriving from its membership to the European Union. Attention should be focused on those concrete measures and proposals that are unlikely to give rise to old controversies, such as institutional changes.

Although the main role of the Conference on the Future of Europe was to enable the European debate and to collect opinions on the development of the European project, this context has also generated indirect results that are worth recalling: increasing awareness on topical European issues, simultaneously connecting citizens to the European agenda, identifying how European citizens relate to a new debate mechanism and simultaneously centralising the views, concerns and hopes of European citizens.

Given the vulnerabilities arising from disinformation campaigns targeting Member States, it is important that the European Union is the one that creates and facilitates safe spaces for debate, while providing real information and facts about European policies. Strengthening the credibility of European expertise and promoting it should be cross-cutting priorities in the pursuit of European policies and objectives.

1. Introductory remarks regarding the events organised in the margins of the Conference on the Future of Europe

The European Institute of Romania is a public institution, coordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), whose mission is to provide expertise in the field of European affairs to the public administration, the business environment, social partners and civil society.

The EIR also seeks, through its specific objectives, to make a series of contributions to the development of the European spirit and values, by engaging Romanian citizens in the debate about topical European issues. Thus, the EIR has actively engaged in **the promotion of the Conference on the Future of Europe** and the organisation of related thematic events.

The EIR's mission is also reflected in the work of EUROPE DIRECT (ED) Bucharest, an information centre hosted by the EIR from 2021 to 2025. In carrying out its activity, EUROPE DIRECT works closely with the European Commission's Representation and the European Parliament Liaison Office and contributes to increasing the visibility of European priorities in the Bucharest-Ilfov region. Thus, **the promotion of citizens' engagement in the Conference on the Future of Europe** has also been a very important part of the actions carried out by ED in 2021 and in the beginning of 2022. A series of interactive workshops, information sessions and events for the general public, dedicated to topics such as digitalisation, climate change, circular economy, education, transport, the future of Europe and European democracy, have been initiated and organised.

Given the pandemic context, almost all the events were held online, ensuring the participation of **citizens** from different regions of Romania. The **events** that took place from 22 April to 9 March 2022 were attended by pupils and students, teachers, young professionals, seniors, representatives of central and local institutions, businessmen, representatives of non-governmental organisations, citizens interested in European

affairs and the future of Europe. Moreover, these events offered the opportunity to invite decision-makers specialised in European affairs, who were able to provide an overview of the current context and the trends that will influence the European future.

As regards the way in which Romanian citizens relate to the future of Europe, it is important to note that, during one of the events organised by EUROPE DIRECT, the question “**How optimistic are you about the future of Europe?**” was addressed and most of the participants said that they were **optimistic (60%) and very optimistic (17%)**. A question was also asked about **the challenges they considered to be the most important** for the future of the European Union, and the vast majority **ranked** the fields of **health and security first (76%)**, followed by education (53%), environment and climate change (44%), social justice and equality (42%).

2. The views shared by Romanian citizens in the margins of the Conference on the Future of Europe

The events organised by the European Institute of Romania, in partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or through EUROPE DIRECT Bucharest, have reflected the topics mentioned as priorities for the debates in the margins of the Conference on the Future of Europe. Most of the actions undertaken have been associated with the double green and digital transition, with an emphasis on citizens' opinions and interests. During one of the events, it was mentioned that Romania needs an intersectoral economic approach, that contributes to climate neutrality, through digital instruments, while taking into account their social and environmental impact.

More information about the materials related to the organisation of the events can be found on the website of [the European Institute of Romania](#) and of [EUROPE DIRECT Bucharest](#). Moreover, *Annex 1* includes the summary of events and information about the target groups that participated in the debates.

As regards **the methodology for extracting the conclusions, the comments and the ideas expressed** by citizens, the following steps were followed: centralising all information and data related to the events in a unitary format, ordering the information according to the categories to which they refer, drawing the main ideas related to each category, drawing up a scoreboard including citizens' interests (presented in the conclusions section of this report).

The conclusions, comments and ideas drawn from the organised events can be included in/fall within the following 13 categories: digitalisation and digital transformation, climate change and environment, sustainable mobility, economic recovery, agriculture and sustainable development, social justice and jobs, education, health, European democracy and citizen participation, disinformation, polarisation and populism, the transatlantic relationship, resilience and the future of the EU, Romania's contribution to the Conference on the Future of Europe. Each category presents the most common opinions expressed by citizens, and, in some cases, concrete proposals from them are mentioned.

2.1. Opinions on digitalisation and digital transformation

One of the topics that was frequently mentioned at the EIR events is digitalisation, followed by digital transformation. Citizens of different ages frequently referred to the impact of the pandemic on digitalisation, to the skills that should be developed by the population, to the necessary policy architecture, to digital public services, to smart cities and to the new technologies that are seen as a factor of competitiveness. The conclusions drawn in relation to this category can be included in the *Digital transformation* topic on/from the multilingual platform of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

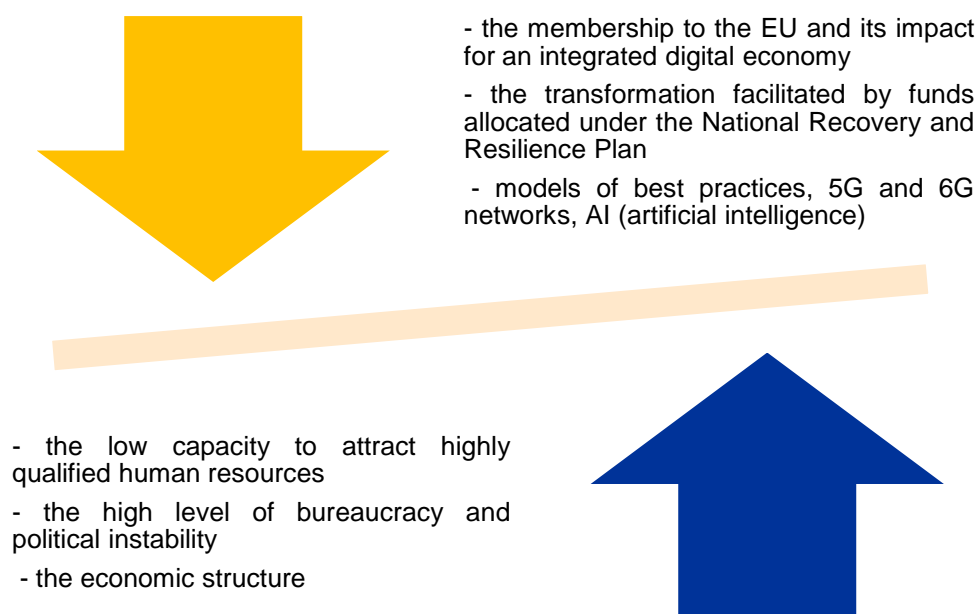
Thus, the ideas and comments expressed by Romanian citizens concerning digitalisation/digital transformation include the following:

1. The main fields considered important in the area of digital transition are: **connectivity** (hyperconnectivity, 5G, 6G), **ensuring the necessary infrastructure for data transfer and communications**, strengthening **research and collaborative capabilities in digital technologies** and data platforms.
2. A paradigm change is needed In Romania, since there is still much debate about digitalisation, but **trends are towards digital transition/transformation** (involving, among other things, a process of changing the way of thinking and organising processes in both (the) private and public sectors, the automation of certain processes, etc.).
3. Human capital is the essence of digitalisation, and, in this area, Romania faces a problem related to the **need for large-scale development of digital skills**.
4. The problem is not always related to the access to technology/Internet (as Romania received a good score on the connectivity dimension or the 4G/5G coverage), but rather to **the understanding of how people's skills should be developed** so that they are able to use existing infrastructure and programmes.
5. The mobile penetration rate in Romania is rather high (115%) and thus it should be analysed how **public services** could be adapted **so that they can be accessed from mobile devices**.
6. **Digital public services are fragmented at local, regional and national level** in Romania; making a series of traditional bureaucratic procedures available online has been a rather inefficient policy, because, in fact, these procedures are not suitable for the digital environment.
7. It is still uncertain **how many eGovernment services are available in Romania** (there is an ongoing process of cataloguing), mainly because these services have been developed without an integrated approach.
8. **The digitalisation of a public institution** involves more than just the acquisition of technology; it requires changing the way of working, analysing the ways in which civil servants can use digital instruments/tools and identifying the skills they need to develop.
9. Digitalisation is expected to reduce the costs, but we should also consider the **costs inherent to this process** (additional allocations for the development of appropriate/specific skills and the purchase of new technologies).

10. Digital transformation cannot lead to long-term changes without **a multilevel governance structure** that facilitates the process of public policy-making (in Romania, many decisions continue to be made according to the *top-down* model).
11. **Expanding digital literacy** will generate a transformation of the society/ social transformation and will accelerate innovation processes.
12. Unlike the central public administration, which is more focused on maintaining bureaucratic procedures, **local government offers better conditions for citizens' involvement in digitalisation processes**. These local authorities must seize the opportunity and become more proactive.
13. Romanian cities/towns tend to become smart, without using data (not necessarily at public policy level, but in terms of simple decisions that are not made on the basis of data) and without involving the people (**using local intelligence to address community issues**).
14. Priority should be given to: **providing digital training to young people, promoting the benefits of digital skills development for adults** between 50 and 70 and facilitating their transition to the virtual world, promoting a culture of lifelong learning, the Erasmus+ Programme and the digitalisation (at the level) of the whole society.
15. It is essential to **take measures that respond to the challenges faced by citizens in the online environment**, especially in online education, and to make available activities/techniques that contribute to the harmonious development of the teacher-pupil relationship in the online environment.
16. The pandemic increased **the need for continuous training for teachers**, who expressed their wish to have access to free, high-quality courses, to enable them to better respond to the challenges posed by digital transformation.
17. **The pandemic has accelerated pre-existing global trends**: digital transformation, climate change, the emergence of the G2 world (giving rise to the need to discuss the EU's role in this world), the rise of digital giants, the creation of a world with a few winners and many losers.
18. **Technology is a tool of competitiveness between states**, which should be used with caution – regulating digital platforms for the benefit of citizens and ensuring the accountability of the companies behind them.

As for *the advantages and disadvantages of the digital transformation* of the Romanian economy, the following ideas and comments were drawn (Figure 1):

Figure 1. The advantages and disadvantages of the digital transformation of the Romanian economy



Source: participants in the debates



An idea from the citizens: to create a “European Digital Identity wallet” that includes all necessary documents for citizens

2.2. Opinions on climate change and the environment

Another topic of interest for the debates concerned climate change and aspects related to the environment. Thus, issues such as the liberalisation of energy prices, decarbonisation, air quality, green projects, green skills, waste selective collection, biodiversity and the protection of forests were raised. The conclusions drawn in relation to this category can be included in the *Climate change and the environment* topic on the multilingual platform of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

As regards Romania, one of the main challenges discussed was **the effective use of a very large amount of funds resulting from the overlapping of several funding mechanisms:** the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, the Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021-2027 and the 3 additional years of funding under the Multiannual Financial Framework for 2014-2020.

The ideas expressed and the comments made by citizens include the following concerns:

1. The perception remains that **digital transformation and the European Green Deal are not included often enough on the public agenda**, despite the fact that the EU's priorities are also Romania's priorities.
2. One of the future crises will be generated by the **social impact of the liberalisation of the energy market**, which will have a direct impact on Romania.

3. Citizens do not understand **the benefits of energy prices liberalisation** in the short term, given that they are facing a significant increase in their energy bills, which has an impact on economic development and competitiveness.
4. It is necessary to **implement a decarbonisation policy, that takes into account the situation of countries like Romania** that also rely on the energy from coal mining.
5. If wood is less used for heating in the future, alternative solutions must be identified urgently, so that **vulnerable consumers** are not put at risk.
6. Romania needs **measures to improve air quality**, to protect the forests (such as limiting forest felling, which is very important) and to promote greening measures.
7. It is necessary **to improve the knowledge concerning the effects of climate change**, especially at the level of public authorities. The capacity to use available sources of funding is not encouraging, and delays in the absorption of funds will reduce the efficiency by 33% (for a one-year delay).
8. Recommendations related to the sources of funding for green projects: increasing the access to the funding of green projects in a sustainable way; **supporting structural changes in the economy towards a higher value-added economy** (industrial policy is essential); improving transparency and information availability, raising awareness about the impact of climate change (The National Bank of Romania prepared the climate risk dashboard for the banking sector in Romania).
9. An orderly transition is essential because **companies classified as carbon intensive generate more than 40% of the added value** and hold more than 50% of the assets in the economy as a whole.
10. It is important to increase public awareness and accountability about the impact of each mismanaged resource.
11. It would be useful **to create a platform accessible to all environmental organisations and groups**, that would provide educational institutions with up-to-date information on environmental preservation, and to engage the young generation in environmental protection, responsible recycling and waste reduction, in order to protect the environment and to secure a “green” future for Europe.
12. **The double transition overlaps with and complements European policy actions**, requiring the development of specific competences to ensure that all future activities – although some of them are already being carried out - are properly managed from an educational perspective.
13. **Pupils should be aware of the truth about the environment.** In order to form an objective opinion on this subject, children must be in touch with reality, learn from the mistakes of past generations and understand why they must not harm nature.
14. It is important to **educate young people on climate change**, but also to organise events with direct benefits for the environment.
15. As far as the environment is concerned, two directions must be followed: **biodiversity conservation and the transition from fossil fuels to green energy.**

16. **Changing environmental mentalities** is complicated, but not impossible. A joint effort, however, would lead to actions beneficial to the environment.
17. It is necessary **to promote selective waste collection** (including the installation of more containers for selective waste collection on certain routes), so that people can become increasingly aware of its benefits.



An idea from the citizens (Irina, a third-grader): when you cut a tree, you should plant two. When you cut a forest, you should plant two instead.

2.2.1. Opinions on sustainable mobility

The field of sustainable mobility is closely linked to climate change. Transport is a concern shared by many citizens, who are worried that the state of the railway and road infrastructure will remain unchanged in the following years. The proposals presented in this area include the following:

1. **Restoring cross-border passenger transportation** which provides connections to the EU's neighbouring states (e.g., Romania-Serbia).
2. **Improving transportation between neighbouring localities from two EU Member States** [e.g., the Cenad (Romania) – Apátfalva (Hungary) line].
3. **Increasing the number of buses on routes frequently run between two Member States** [e.g., Giurgiu Nord (Romania) and Ruse (Bulgaria)].
4. Limiting the car traffic in the cities and **improving local public transport**, to contribute to the achievement of climate objectives.
5. Improving and **promoting railway transportation** so that it becomes an attractive alternative for people using (their) cars.
6. **Funds** are needed **for the development of Romania's road and railway infrastructure**, and these funds/they must be spent more transparently than before.

2.3. Opinions on economic recovery

Both during the events with several topics for discussion and during other thematic debates organised, people expressed a great interest in the methods and tools that will lead to post-pandemic economic recovery. Citizens showed their willingness to understand the type of funding Romania will receive through *NextGenerationEU*, but also to find out information about the areas in which projects related to the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) will be implemented. To address this need, the EIR invited a number of policy makers who provided information and answered citizens' questions. These aspects can be included in *A stronger economy, social justice and jobs* topic on the multilingual platform of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

The conclusions drawn in this field refer to the following aspects:

1. The major impact of the pandemic led to **the adoption of the largest financial package of 750 billion euros** for economic recovery, as well as the need to ensure resilience at all levels, allowing consolidation in the face of possible future shocks.

2. Funds from *NextGenerationEU* should lead to **a fast recovery and the transformation of the EU development model** into a sustainable, digitalised and fair one. One of the main components of *NextGenerationEU* is the Recovery and Resilience Facility, which is intended to stimulate structural reforms and investments in the Member States.
3. The European Union has taken **unprecedented measures to manage the effects of the pandemic**: mobilising the EU's budget in order to allow maximum flexibility in the application of budget and state aid rules; the package of measures to support workers; the Pan-European Guarantee Fund managed by the European Investment Bank; loans granted to Member States under the European Stability Mechanism; the temporary suspension of the application of the European Union's Stability and Growth Pact.
4. **The suspension of the European regulations on financial discipline during the pandemic** has been a necessary and fair measure, but there is a need for a debate on how these rules will be adjusted in the future, that is the possibility of continuing the Recovery and Resilience Facility concerning joint indebtedness of the Member States (joint debt instrument).
5. **Increasing the flexibility of the financial allocation rules** allowed the European funds allocated under the multiannual financial framework to be reallocated for the management of the economic effects of the pandemic, as was the case for Romania, that was thus able to allocate funds for the payment of technical unemployment.
6. In September 2021, the European Commission published its proposal for a decision approving Romania's NRRP [which was subsequently approved by the Council of the EU]. **Romania has requested both grants and loans**, which will be used for the implementation of structural reforms that are essential to increasing economic and social resilience, reducing disparities, but also to making investments to accelerate the green and digital transition.
7. **Citizens' expectations regarding NRRP are very high** and there is a risk of very high disappointment in the event of lower performance in the implementation of the envisaged reforms. The way in which the funds will be spent is very important and it is necessary to follow the EU's priorities, since they are our priorities, too.
8. **Romania is considered to be a late absorber**, with higher absorption rates in the fifth and sixth year of the programming period.
9. Romania will also benefit from funds amounting to 46 billion euros from the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework, for which the allocations for the Cohesion Policy and the Common Agricultural Policy are very important, and which **will allow Romania to move closer to achieving convergence with the European average**.
10. Under the NRRP, **30 billion euros** were allocated to Romania, a part of this sum depending on the extent to which the economy will be affected in the period 2021-2027.
11. **The pandemic continues to generate uncertainty** and the pandemic economy might last longer than the post-pandemic economy.

12. In order to achieve real economic growth, **Romania needs to capitalise on its strengths, such as being an EU Member State**, to make effective use of the labour force and of its people's intelligence.

2.3.1. Opinions on social justice and jobs

The aspects related to social justice and jobs are closely linked to the field of economy. They were raised by citizens during several debates, and some of the concerns expressed regarded the national minimum wage, the development of vocational education in Romania and the training of human resources for the jobs of the future. The comments and proposals from the citizens referred to the following aspects:

1. **The national minimum wage is at subsistence level** for many European citizens and the wage levels in the countries that are lagging behind (such as Romania) must be brought in line with European wages/wage levels.
2. In order to train the labour force necessary for the economy and to stimulate the society to progress at the same speed as European partners, **we need changes in the Romanian education system**. Some of these changes are addressed/presented in the *Educated Romania* project, such as these general directions: increasing curricular relevance in the area of general education and developing a complete pathway in the vocational education and training, respectively the dual education system.
3. **Substantial funds** have been provided for **in the NRRP in order to strengthen training poles in centres with diversified economies**, through non-tertiary education. Thus, young people from mono-industrial regions will not be limited in their career prospects and this will enable them to follow the full pathway, from non-tertiary education (today, vocational schools and technological high schools) to higher education, in close connection with the economic operators present in these areas.
4. We can imagine **a pole for automotive industry in Craiova, a pole for IT in Cluj or a pole in Timișoara, closely linked to the economic environment** in the region. Thus, European funds that focus on societies and on the economies of the future can be linked to the willingness of the private sector to invest in the training of the labour force.
5. As regards vocational training, it cannot be done without **the involvement of the economic operator** (transportation, meals, scholarships), that must contact schools and communicate them which are the skills it needs, and to offer practical learning opportunities.
6. In Romania we have the following paradox: there are **companies that lack personnel with the skills required for their activities** and, at the same time, there is **a large number of people who are not in employment, education or training, the so-called NEETs** (young people who currently do not have a job and are not enrolled in education or training). Moreover, many of the active people say that they feel the need for a career change, the so-called reskilling or/and upskilling process, and so we end up in a much less differentiated area than we had before between basic training and further training.

7. **What do we want citizens of the future to look like?** What skills do they need to have? What are the jobs of the future? These are questions to which we need to find answers based on studies.
8. During the pandemic, **many companies focused on improving human resources** and reduced working hours to allow their employees to take part in refresher training, which took place on platforms such as EPAL and Europass.

2.4. Opinions on agriculture and rural development

Another topic of great concern for Romanian citizens was agriculture and rural development. The event that addressed this issue as a priority was held several days after the start of the Russian military aggression in Ukraine, so some of the interventions from the guests and the public were related to food security issues, the vulnerabilities in supply chains and the impact of the geopolitical crisis on price stability and stocks of agri-food products. The conclusions drawn in relation to this category can be included in the *Agriculture* topic on the multilingual platform of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

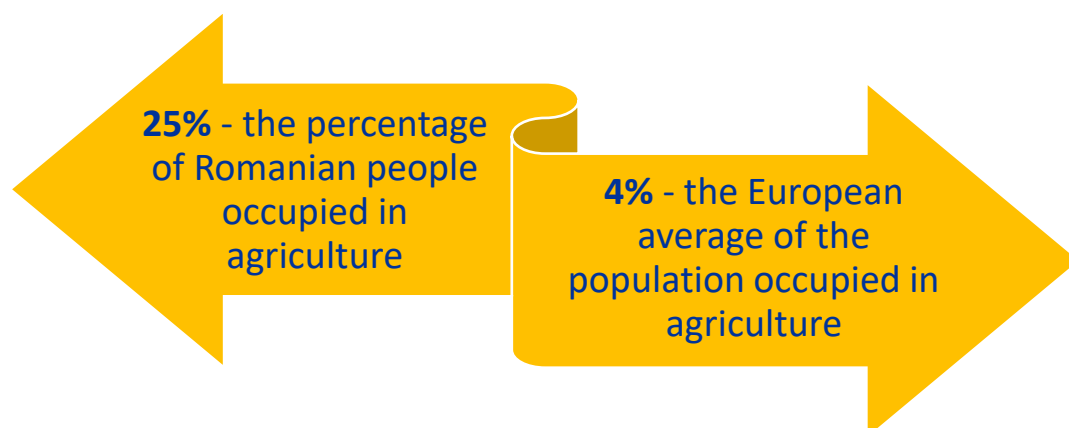
The interventions of participants in the debate reflected the following questions, interests and shared information:

1. The health situation generated by the pandemic highlighted **the vulnerability of the European food chain**, and it is important to grasp the opportunities to make systemic changes, by anticipating shocks or changing the way the food system works, including by ensuring a better use of European research funds allocated to research.
2. At European level, the European Union needs to monitor the impact of the European Green Deal on the competitiveness of agri-food products on the international markets, in order to ensure **the resilience of the European agricultural economy and consumer protection**.
3. Some studies assessing the impact of the “farm to fork” strategy show that reducing the use of fertilisers by 20% would lead to **a decrease in production and price increase of up to 20%**, while forecasts of crop yields per hectare also include significant reductions, depending on the Member State(s) analysed.
4. **The security situation in Ukraine** is likely to **result in a major impact on agriculture**, both in respect of meeting the demand for cereals and nutrients and in terms of economic costs. In Romania, the situation is favourable, as there are more than 3 million farms, mostly family households and small and medium-sized farms that can ensure food security and are less vulnerable to crises.
5. Even if there is a risk of a global food crisis, **Romania can produce large quantities of agricultural and food products**. At the same time, national reserves of basic necessities are considered important, particularly in view of the cereal production for 2022.
6. **Romanian agriculture faces several types of challenges**: the need to increase the storage capacity of carbon (reducing agricultural work per hectare, introducing perennial crops), the conservation of resources for agriculture (reducing the areas of monocultures, improving the means and instruments for the rationalisation of the

use of chemicals/chemical substances), increasing the contribution of agriculture to the supply of ecosystem goods, other than agricultural products (organising multifunctional agriculture), accelerating digital transformation in agriculture.

7. IT systems for **food traceability** may be a solution for food safety, but there are difficulties concerning their implementation at transnational level.
8. A few examples of how technology can contribute to agriculture: **automating older agricultural machinery/equipment** at low costs, increasing accuracy in the application of treatments, by using monitoring equipment such as **temperature and humidity sensors**, pest detection traps, **multispectral cameras for the analysis of crops and their health**, collecting data remotely through weather stations, automating the process of food storage monitoring, and improving product traceability.
9. Romania has a significant trade deficit, due to imports of processed products and **poor market disposal of fresh or processed products** resulting from the production of small and medium-sized farms.
10. **In this case, a solution may be a food hub**, which is a business or an organisation that actively manages the aggregation, distribution and marketing of food products from local and regional producers in order to meet market demand.
11. **Generational change/turnover in agriculture** must be supported; the measures supporting young people in agriculture have had good results, but financial support is needed for agricultural and food education, both in non-tertiary/pre-university education and higher education.
12. Romania is one of the lowest ranking countries (11%) in terms of the percentage of young people under 40 employed in agriculture, **only 2.8% of the managers of agricultural holdings having completed specialised/expert studies/training**.
13. **Investments in sustainable rural development** should be linked to supporting the generational turnover in agriculture, paying greater attention to the system of education and training for the experts in the field.

Figure 2. The percentage of the population employed in agriculture (Romania vs. the European average)



Source: Eurostat (2022).

2.5. Opinions on education

Many of the citizens attending the debates were teachers, school inspectors, pupils, students or young NEETs. Thus, several persons talked about the impact of the pandemic on the digitalisation of education, both positively, through the development of new skills, and negatively, by decreasing participation in learning environments for those who did not have a good Internet connection or devices to rely on. The emphasis was on the lessons we should learn from the pandemic and the measures that are expected to be taken to increase the citizens' access to formal, non-formal or informal learning opportunities. The aspects related to this category can be included in the *Education, culture, youth and sport* topic on the multilingual platform of the Conference on the Future of Europe. The citizens' proposals referred to the following aspects:

1. The benefits that the European decision brings must be the ones expected by citizens and must be visible to them, whether we are in a period of crisis or calmness. Therefore, there is a need for **more effective and in-depth coordination between Member States as regards education policies**.
2. Compared to other EU Member States, **Romania has a particular characteristic, namely the urban-rural discrepancies**. European funds must help us narrow these educational discrepancies; they are in no way generated by children's capacities, but by factors which are external to the human, academic and professional potential of individuals.
3. The citizens of Romania are diverse and **children from disadvantaged areas cannot be approached the same way we approach those from families with an above-average economic level**. Those who face domestic violence every day cannot be approached in the same way we approach those who live in harmonious families, those who are at subsistence level – about 100,000 children, according to the World Vision Foundation – cannot be approached in the same way we approach children that have everything they need.
4. The education reform is possible if the entire society prioritises it and makes the necessary changes, based on preliminary studies, in order for **Romania to align with both the European trends** and the strategies necessary to solve the national problems.
5. It is important to **remember the lessons learned during (the various stages of) the pandemic**, especially regarding the online education (for example, inadequate training for online education, digital tools unsuitable for online teaching and collaboration).
6. The pandemic has increased **the need for further training for teachers**, who expressed their wish to have access to free, high-quality courses, to enable them to better respond to the challenges posed by digital transformation.
7. There is a need **to train smaller groups of pupils**, because, in terms of (educational) performance, 30 pupils cannot work effectively online.
8. Education in Romania is outdated, and online learning requires a different pedagogy and motivation to engage the students; there is a concern that many persons were left behind because of online learning, as there is **a concern that**

universities and schools will resume face-to-face classes and will forget about the role of online learning in digital skills training.

9. There is a need to **rethink the educational process in the context of digitalisation**, to encourage and coordinate (it) from the perspective of using intra-European mobility, to facilitate the development of digital skills, to strengthen the European identity, the relationship between education and employment, and how education can help strengthen the health sector, to identify solutions to climate changes and to fight disinformation.
10. We can see education as an investment in the future. An educated population is creative, innovative and takes the initiative, and these elements are linked to the economy of the future. In the economy of the future, **professional training is a lifelong process**.
11. **Meeting points between the education system and the private system** are required; comprehensive support programmes should be developed to address both social needs (educational materials, hot meals, school after school, social scholarships) and the educational needs (counselling, remedial education, an individual training profile suitable for each child).
12. **The best interest of the child /must prevail**, although sometimes we only think about the best interest of the teacher(s) or of the school.
13. It is important for citizens **to increase the budget allocated to education**, but also to increase the support from the competent authorities, which should provide facilities, equipment and learning resources adapted to the new trends.
14. **Research and innovation are another particularly important aspect** related to the role of education in society. In this context, it is necessary to encourage the participation of Romanian universities in the European network of universities.
15. Education needs to receive more support from the perspective of enhancing investments in research and innovation. This is a matter / an aspect related to the **development of the internal market**.
16. **The technological development gaps between Europe and other international actors** are considerable. The development and strengthening of cooperation between Member States and academic research environments must be much better coordinated.



An idea from the citizens: school councils should organise informative sessions about studies in the European Union.

2.6. Opinions on health policies

Aspects related to the health sector were raised during several debates, in which citizens expressed the view that managing the pandemic was a test for European societies. They also pointed out that more support was needed from the European Union, and some of them were in favour of expanding the competences of the EU institutions in the health sector. The conclusions drawn in relation to this category can be included in the *Health* topic on the multilingual platform of the Conference on the Future of Europe. Citizens expressed the following opinions concerning the health sector:

1. The European Union has mechanisms to achieve European solidarity both internally and externally, but coordination has been more difficult during the crisis caused by Covid-19, **as the EU does not have significant competences in the field of health.**
2. The health crisis has been a surprise for many societies, and the existing gaps and the wide disparities hinder the act of governance and affect the society, making it difficult (for people) to adapt. **During crisis situations, the quality and the accountability of politicians are put to the test**, as merely responding to the crisis is not enough; prevention measures and preparedness for action are also needed.
3. At the health system level, **the pandemic showed the importance of prevention, digitalisation and the benefits of regional integration.** The principles of decentralisation, debureaucracy and dynamization need to be applied in order to increase the quality of health services, to attract funds for prevention, and increase the attractiveness, independence and professionalisation of the medical profession.
4. **Health research and innovation must be based on a sustainable strategy** that includes all healthcare sectors and ensures its continuity in the medium and long term, and the connection with Europe, respectively.
5. Although **the Covid-19 pandemic was initially considered a “big equaliser”** affecting all the states, in practice, it proved to be a great differentiator, from an economic, social and political point of view.
6. Expectations are very high in terms of the role of the Union, although in the field of education and health, the Union only has shared competences. **The pandemic has worked as a trigger of reflection processes** on how we are advancing and further coordinating our national policies at European level.
7. Synergistic actions are needed for a better communication and a **clearer understanding of the advantages enjoyed by Romania as an EU Member State in the fields of healthcare**, pharmaceutical policy, crisis management, food safety, health investments, etc. Romania needs to make its voice heard in European debates in order to reduce the existing gaps between the national health system and the ones at EU level.
8. This is the right time **to talk about increasing the EU’s role in the fields of health(care), education and digital transformation.**
9. Managing the post-pandemic period may be equally difficult, if not more difficult than the management of the pandemic crisis itself.
10. **The European Parliament should invest more in the health sector** so that health crises can be resolved faster and easier.

2.7. Opinions on European democracy and citizens’ participation

A topic to which many references were made, in a cross-cutting manner, during the events was European democracy. Participants were interested in finding ways to reach out to decision-makers more easily, to have transparency and accountability of political leaders promoted, and to protect the institutions responsible for decision-making and enforcing decisions from the assault of illiberal tendencies. The aspects

subsumed to this category may be associated to the *European democracy* topic from the multilingual platform of the Conference on the Future of Europe. Summary of opinions expressed by citizens:

1. Citizens' involvement is a key element in shaping the future of the European Union. The history of the European construction shows that the **EU is a project for citizens which cannot move forward without consulting them**.
2. The current period continues to be marked by the pandemic crisis; the **European Union must be united**, act and maintain its response capacity for the benefit of European citizens.
3. **It is important for citizens to rely on the national institutions, but also on the European ones**, whose aim is to provide support to citizens, especially during this period, with a view to sustainable recovery, and to improve the economic and social resilience of EU Member States.
4. There is a need for **measures to reduce corruption**.
5. Citizens wish that their political leaders to be more accountable for the promises they make during the electoral campaign, in order to ensure their implementation. There is a need to **better explain the duties those elected will have**, and how they can deliver as citizens' representatives.
6. **Citizens' participation is important for strengthening European democracy**, but political responsibility and leadership at European and national levels are still much needed.
7. During the pandemic, **citizens were disconnected from decision-makers**, so we need to rethink this interaction and see how it can be facilitated by the digital means.
8. Another aspect worth discussing in this context is that of **citizens' involvement in identifying problems in the community** and seeking solutions from public institutions.
9. A phenomenon that started a few years ago continues: more and more people **(especially young people) really want to understand what the European project is**, a process that can be called the European constructive movement.
10. The lack of involvement, the exclusion, the urban-rural gap, the lack of interest, the inequality, the lack of information and the lack of the ability for critical thinking are the **challenges young people face in Europe today**.
11. **The European Union is a Union of values**, and there is a need to promote these values globally.



A comment from citizens: it is vital that we “fight” for the European project, that we all engage in building together the united future of the European Union.

2.7.1. Opinions on disinformation, polarisation and populism

Citizens' considerations related to fake news, polarisation in society and populist tendencies were closely connected with the topic of European democracy. Citizens of all ages have drawn attention to the trap of unverified information and rumours that can lead to wrong decisions from all. They also referred to the global role of the

European Union and the values that must guide our relations with third states. The shared proposals include the following:

1. At the level of society there is a **gap between the daily situation of citizens and the political speech**, a greater attention being necessary as regards the needs of individuals, a more efficient management of the effects of fake news and a strengthening of the institutions to ensure the continuity of the act of governance.
2. Regarding Romania's situation, **the negative scenario is that the exit from the pandemic might not have major effects on Romania** (e.g., from a social point of view: maintaining polarisation), being necessary to find certain solutions to improve the prospects.
3. We are currently facing a certain degree of disinformation and we need to **tackle all sorts of trends that are increasingly dangerous** from the point of view of communicating the benefits and results that EU transposes and thinks for its citizens. In such times of insecurity there is a **tendency to lay the blame on someone** and the **EU is directly affected**, as an embodiment of authority and a consequence of globalisation, issues that are exploited in populist speech.
4. It is necessary to address effectively disinformation regarding COVID-19 vaccines, which has to be tackled from a coherent institutional approach. Moreover, the **responsibility of institutions and actors fighting against the spread of fake information needs to be enhanced**, to help the efforts of health specialists in combating the effects of the pandemic.
5. In terms of security, the **topics that have been targeted by hostile propaganda** are: a) "The EU is weak and then we no longer have to make efforts to discuss with it"; b) the alleged lack of unity in the transatlantic world and the effective exploitation of a polarised public speech; it should be noted that none of the narratives passed the reality test, although they were disseminated by certain exponents of the public opinion.
6. However, we must be careful to **populist political actors who may turn to citizens** to promote Eurosceptic or even extremist attitudes.
7. All these crises lead to **polarisation, splitting, two-speed globalisation**, the two-speed phenomenon, which is particularly dangerous.
8. Politicians who exploit emotions and adopt the populist style are considered the main "culprits" for the **decreased confidence in democracy** by young participants in debates.
9. We cannot have an effective EU communication if we do not have **tangible results/progresses of tangible action**.
10. The European Union needs a stronger policy in order to strengthen solidarity beyond its dialogue with the citizens. Particular attention must be paid to the consolidation and unification of the Euro zone, to **countering the nationalist accents and the illiberal trends**, in order to avoid the divide and the great threats undermining the European economy.
11. We will face certain challenges for which we are not prepared, such as: **diversity and extremism**, which are introduced in Romania's Defence Strategy.

12. The importance of the multilateral instruments that we have at our disposal, the pandemic has shown us **the force and the power of multilateralism**, especially when facing horizontal challenges.
13. Strengthening EU's role as a global player is a very important and relevant topic when we talk about the future of Europe. Questions such as "How long are we going to delay the enlargement to the Western Balkans?" or "**Where are the geographical boundaries of the EU?**" will still need an answer.
14. **Geopolitical competition** should be a way of international development, not a monopoly of one geopolitical actor over others.

2.8. Opinions on the EU in the world and the transatlantic relationship (the European Union and the United States of America)

Another topic of high interest among Romanian citizens was the cooperation between the European Union and the United States of America, the two actors being seen as the basic pillars for Central and Eastern European countries. During the discussions, the participants shared views on Romania's role in the transatlantic relationship, adherence to Euro-Atlantic values and contribution to promoting an international system based on rules, democracy and human rights, especially in an unstable security context. Romania's role in constantly promoting the strengthening of the relationship with the United States on the European agenda was also mentioned. The views expressed by citizens also reflected how they relate to common areas of cooperation, i.e., how the challenges of the transatlantic relationship are dealt with. The opinions included in this category may be associated to the topic *EU in the world* from the multilingual platform of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

Summary of opinions expressed by citizens:

1. **Romania and Central and Eastern European countries have relied on two pillars**, which remained almost unchanged in the past 30 years: the membership of the European Union and NATO; Romanians see the transatlantic relationship in all its dimensions (within NATO, within the EU-US partnership, within the EU-Canada Strategic Partnership and within the EU-NATO cooperation) as being based on common values and principles.
2. With the Biden administration, the **US has repositioned itself in terms of environmental protection and climate change**, but the EU has set itself more ambitious targets for accelerating the energy transition; Romania must remain involved in the European debates on the taxonomy of green energy sources, as it is in its interest to have gas and nuclear energy included in this category and funded accordingly.
3. The **areas of cooperation where the relationship between the EU and the US can be strengthened** are seen as: a global economic recovery and sustainable revival; trade; investment and technological cooperation; promoting green growth; health; promoting multilateralism and strengthening democracy, continuing enlargement. On the other hand, agriculture and the digital transition are areas where the US and the EU have different views.

4. In the context of the crisis between Ukraine and the Russian Federation, **the US sought to maintain the EU on a unified direction**, based on a common understanding of the Russian threat and the definition of a new sanction regime in case of possible invasion, focusing on cohesive messages sent to the Russian Federation.
5. There are **persistent differences in the transatlantic relationship**, especially regarding the **relations with China**, with which the EU has a systemic and sometimes competitive cooperation relationship, depending on its own interests; the increased rivalry between the US and China, together with the threat posed by the Russian Federation to European security, are geostrategic features that will have a significant impact on the structure of transatlantic relations.
6. Transatlantic relations have been marked by ups and downs, and the post-pandemic era is characterised by a **resetting of the foundation of the transatlantic relationship**, where security issues are of increasing importance; the dynamics of relations has also been influenced by issues such as the resurgence of populisms in certain parts of the world, the temptation to promote unilateralism in international relations, the withdrawal from Afghanistan.
7. **Transatlantic unity** has the potential to lead, in the second place, to another kind of polarisation (a horizontal one, a political fragmentation based on socio-economic criteria, which is visible in all transatlantic states); this polarisation manifests itself as the two types of globalisations, the two overlapping transatlantic worlds.
8. One of the important drivers of strengthening the transatlantic relationship is the **young people, who favour multilateral cooperation and international guidance**; digital regulatory standards, the fight against disinformation through media literacy or means to ensure a fair green transition are issues of interest for young people in the EU and the US.
9. A competitive element of Romania could be an **advocacy campaign promoting EU-US cooperation** (joint study programmes, recognition of studies/diplomas, scientific exchanges).
10. **Cooperation in research** is another dimension of interest for transatlantic relations, as the EU and the US share the same values in terms of research: openness, transparency, inclusion, academic freedom and innovation; the US had the highest participation in EU's research and innovation programmes, and US researchers are members of teams implementing projects through the Horizon Europe programme.
11. Placing China on the transatlantic dialogue agenda is one of the most interesting initiatives, and at the same time it is a major challenge for structuring and strengthening the EU's common position in relations with China; it is appropriate to **intensify Romania's concern to recover and capitalise on its own expertise**, acquired in these relations, in order to be able to effectively contribute to the management of that challenge.
12. The European Union needs to **strengthen the security pillar**, which now has a soft component (to counter disinformation and propaganda), where it is much more skilful than NATO; if the EU wants to be a global player, it must make sure that it can promote and support border securitisation.

- 13.** Problems that exist in the transatlantic relationship: we have a **Union seen differentiated by the US in the area of free movement**; the European Parliament has adopted resolutions calling for visa reciprocity to be guaranteed, which may facilitate youth exchanges between the US and the EU; the absence of reciprocity could in the medium- and long-term lead to less enthusiasm towards the US.



A comment from citizens: the signals from Eastern Europeans from 2014 till now, in the sense that the Russian Federation would pose a threat to European security, have come true.

2.9. Opinions on resilience and the future of the EU

A large part of the ideas expressed during the events were related to understanding and building the EU's resilience and the future of the European project. Young people argued that, when thinking about the European future, we should start from the education provided and that we should better prepare current and future generations for the problems that may arise. Representatives from several local authorities argued that the EU resilience must also start from ensuring cybersecurity, namely from overcoming the vulnerabilities we have in the public administration. The summary of the conclusions from the debates includes:

- 1.** The lessons of this pandemic crisis must not leave us indifferent; once the crisis is past, we must see the lessons we have learned and build our responses on these lessons: **a Union that is more resilient, more tailored to the challenges we face**, and which meets the citizens' expectations; the EU needs to be more inclusive and cohesive.
- 2. The key to the internal resilience of the European Union is the internal market with its fundamental freedoms**, its performance during the Covid-19 pandemic being an indicator for EU's ability to be resilient and react to shocks, with the need to complete the internal market, to lift the obstacles and to strengthen the internal production capacity, namely the supply chains.
- 3. The resilience of the European Union's neighbouring countries** can be achieved through a strategic engagement, including in the field of security, to signal to the partners from the Western Balkans, the Eastern Partnership and the Southern Mediterranean that the EU is a guarantor of stability and prosperity in these regions.
- 4.** In the context of the discussion about the resilience of society, one important aspect is that of increasing it and **how we have to make sure that we operate in a secure manner in a virtual space**. We can mention here related areas such as cybersecurity and the protection of interaction taking place in the digital environment.
- 5.** Resilience must be found in every field, with a **focus on the changes and reforms that we need** in order to ensure that certain events do not take us by surprise and do not have negative effects on our society.
- 6. The European resilience and solidarity are based on the transformation of the European Union** and of the competences it can acquire in the health sector,

meaning, broadly speaking, to establish lines for action on how the EU can respond to crises, considering the **significant interdependencies at the European level**.

7. It is necessary to **be aware of the importance of the resilience of information** and communication systems at European and national levels, as there is now some concern that anti-vaccination narratives may overlap with, and contaminate, the rhetoric about the functioning and benefits of the EU membership.
8. **Digital resilience is essential for strengthening the European society** and for an efficient recovery, a proper vulnerability assessment is needed.
9. **Education is fundamental to the resilience of society**. It generates civic attitudes, an essential part of the support and resilience of liberal democracies, as well as mechanisms of critical thinking. In turn, they support the identification of elements specific to disinformation and manipulation.
10. **The future of Europe also includes the future of education and research**; there are also programming documents at the European level, such as the *European Green Deal* or *A Europe fit for the Digital Age*, which include elements related to education.
11. The future of the EU must be based on a **unifying approach that supports the culture of dialogue, solidarity and cooperation**, in order to strengthen European cohesion and resilience and to focus all action initiatives on the European citizen. These precepts must become milestones of Romanian society, in line with Paul Valéry's vision: "The common territory of Europeans is culture".
12. **Young Europeans have the same concerns as young Romanians**, when it comes to the future of Europe. These things are familiar to young Romanians, who show us that they want us to have more coordination at European level in the field of education.

Figure 3. How do young people in Romania see the future of the European Union?



Source: young participants in the EUROPE DIRECT Bucharest events (2021 and 2022)

2.10. Opinions on Romania's contribution to the Conference on the Future of Europe

The last category of this report is a summary of the conclusions referring to Romania's contribution to the Conference on the Future of Europe. Thus, some of the citizens pointed to the need to identify national interests within the European Union, while for others it was important to say that Romania can bring added value on topics such as digital transformation, resilience or defence of European democracy. These ideas can be included in the topics outlined above and are presented separately precisely in order to summarise the expectations and intentions of Romanian citizens from the Conference on the Future of Europe. The aspects identified relate to:

1. Romania can contribute to this debate by: **developing its own resilience**; ensuring its own prosperity and stability on the European Union's Eastern border; participating in the decision-making process in an informed manner; **helping to diminish the perception that we are dealing with a two-speed Union**.
2. For Romania, it is necessary to **clearly define national interests within the European Union** and to negotiate with the other Member States in order to achieve them.
3. **The debate must also be about Romania's future in the European Union**, with a view to joining the Eurozone, the digital transformation, Romania's integration into production and technological chains, namely Romania's contribution to achieving European resilience through its own development and stability.
4. It is important to show that this debate covers societal evolution topics, and, in this context, which are the conditions we consider best tailored for **developing a European social model**.
5. There is a risk for expectations to be very high, especially considering the experience of previous citizens' consultation formats. **To avoid possible disappointments, it is necessary to turn the expectations into concrete measures**, otherwise it will be a missed opportunity.
6. Points for reflection as regards future debates on this topic: How (much) could national leaders support the development of the European project? Is there a real debate between Brussels and national leaders? How will the Franco-German binomial play? **What kind of EU do we want?** Will the citizens be motivated to take part in the debate? What impact will the debate have on the EU's budget?
7. The pandemic highlighted better than other contexts **the importance of the principles of unity, solidarity and cohesion, as well as the principle of subsidiarity**.
8. At the time of the Delors Commission, there was a very important foresight cell unit; recently, the EU has created a small core, but what is needed is an entity with human resources and expertise (a kind of *forward unit*), to **become the place where long-term lines of action** are managed in an international rule-based order.
9. Debates should focus on essential aspects and should **avoid those that have generated controversies over the years**, such as institutional changes.



A comment from citizens: let's express our point of view so as to make Romanian citizens' support for unity, solidarity and cohesion heard at the Conference.

3. Conclusions regarding the main subjects of interests expressed by te Romanian citizens

Following the interaction with Romanian citizens, belonging to various socio-demographic categories, the European Institute of Romania summarised the opinions and ideas expressed during the events. This report therefore includes the ideas and observations that represent the summary of the opinions expressed, which were organised into 10 categories, as follows: digitalisation and digital transformation, climate change and environment, sustainable mobility, economic recovery, social justice and employment, education, health, European democracy and citizen participation, disinformation, polarisation and populism, the EU in the world and the transatlantic relationship, resilience and the future of the European Union. Romania's contribution to the Conference on the Future of Europe is also added to these categories.

The expectations of the Romanian citizens from the Conference are moderate, occasionally reluctant, though many people associated this consultation with a genuine exercise of citizen participation. At the same time, several of the views expressed concerned the management of expectations and the feasibility of advancing proposals, so as to be reflected at European level. Children and young people tend to be optimistic and very optimistic about the future of the European Union, some of them saying that they wish to contribute to the promotion of European values at national level and to the modernisation of the country. Among the other age groups, there is a moderate optimism that is counterbalanced by the needs of Romanian citizens to see positive concrete changes in the European policy areas that have an impact on daily life: the national minimum wage, the state of the healthcare system, the peculiarities of the education system, the trust in national institutions and political representatives, etc. In this connection, it should also be noted that citizens have called for an increase in EU involvement/competences in areas where the Member State is primarily responsible for decision-making (e.g., health, education).

During the debates, some participants voiced their concerns regarding the impact of the political instability and the security situation in the EU's neighbouring countries on the implementation of the European common agenda. In this respect, constant concerns have been found in relation to the impact of Russian military aggression in Ukraine on various European sectors of activity, including the potential effects on Romanian agriculture. Although Romania's Euro-Atlantic membership has been highlighted many times, many warnings have also been made about possible hybrid threats in the form of propaganda and disinformation campaigns that can influence the level of Romanians' confidence in national and European institutions.

There are some very high expectations with regard to the double transition, in particular as regards a fair green transition, with low costs for citizens and forms of support for the most vulnerable ones being mentioned as requirements. Specifically,

some concerns were raised about reducing the volume of pesticides that could lead to a decrease in agricultural production, as well as concerns about energy sources for consumers living in rural areas. Given that energy price liberalisation is not associated in the short term with a benefit, it is necessary to invest in informing citizens and explaining the benefits that this policy can bring in the medium- and long-term.

Taking into account citizens' concerns and the constant questions they have about decisions taken both at European and national levels, it is important that the Conference debates be continued and translated into concrete measures and recommendations, to be followed-up by representatives of the European institutions. At a time of rising illiberal tendencies and manifesting effects of authoritarian regimes, it will be important for citizens to feel that they are part of the European decision and that the process is transparent, inclusive and responsible.

Last but not least, in order to highlight the main interests of Romanian citizens in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe, a scoreboard was developed (*Table 1*). This scoreboard uses a structure similar to those included in the reports of the debate groups of the Conference on the Future of Europe, but focusing briefly on the concerns of Romanian citizens.

Table 1. Scoreboard – the interests of Romanian citizens in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe

No.	Category	Main subjects of interests
1	Digitalisation and digital transformation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human capital and digital skills • Digital public services • E-Government • Smart cities • Open data • Technology as an element of competitiveness • Hyperconnectivity
2	Climate change and environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liberalisation of the energy market • Decarbonisation policy • Vulnerable consumers • Air quality and reducing pollution • Green knowledge and green skills • Financing sources for green projects • Biodiversity
3	Sustainable mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-border transportation • Railway and road transportation • Public transportation • Transparency in public procurement • Limitation of car traffic in the cities
4	Economic recovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State of national economy • Absorption of European funds • Areas and prospects for reform • Convergence with European average • Economic growth
5.	Agriculture and sustainable development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vulnerability of the European food chain • Impact of the objectives of the European Green Deal on agriculture • Traceability of agri-food products • Use of new technologies in agriculture

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Investment in sustainable rural development</i> • <i>Generational change in agriculture</i>
6	Social justice and jobs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Minimum wage in relation to the European average</i> • <i>Training labour force</i> • <i>Lack of labour force</i> • <i>Jobs of the future</i>
7	Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Urban-rural discrepancy</i> • <i>Poverty and social exclusion</i> • <i>Rethinking the educational process</i> • <i>Training of teachers</i> • <i>Increasing the education budget</i> • <i>Technological development gaps</i>
8	Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>European Union's role/competences</i> • <i>Post-pandemic management</i> • <i>Health investments</i> • <i>Decentralisation, debureaucratisation and dynamization in the health sector</i> • <i>Research and innovation in health</i>
9	European democracy and citizens' participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Citizens' involvement</i> • <i>Trust in institutions</i> • <i>Diminishing corruption</i> • <i>Leadership crisis</i> • <i>Union of values</i>
10	Disinformation, polarisation and populism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Maintaining polarisation</i> • <i>Level of disinformation</i> • <i>Populist political actors</i> • <i>Diversity and extremism</i>
11	The EU in the world and the transatlantic relationship (the European Union and the United States of America)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Security agenda and common response to crises in the EU neighbouring countries</i> • <i>Continuing the Enlargement and the Neighbourhood Policy</i> • <i>Transatlantic unity</i> • <i>Promoting multilateralism and democracy</i> • <i>Romania's role in transatlantic cooperation</i> • <i>Accelerating the energy transition</i> • <i>Resilience of the EU</i>
12	Resilience and the future of the EU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The internal market</i> • <i>Cohesion in the European Union</i> • <i>Production capacity</i> • <i>Enlargement and the European Union's neighbouring countries</i> • <i>Resilience of liberal democracies</i> • <i>Young people and the support for the European project</i>
13	Romania's contribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Developing our own resilience</i> • <i>Definition of interests</i> • <i>Joining the Eurozone and the Schengen area</i> • <i>Romania's future in the European Union</i> • <i>Strategic foresight</i>

Annex 1 – Summary of the events organised by the European Institute of Romania (EIR) in the margins of the Conference on the Future of Europe (April 2021 – March 2022)

Summary of the events organised by the European Institute of Romania (EIR) in the margins of the Conference on the Future of Europe					
No.	Date	Target audience	Topic	Organiser	Guests/Speakers/Facilitators
1	22.04.2021	Pupils and teachers	<i>“Education in the digital age” (world café)</i>	EIR, through EUROPE DIRECT Bucharest	Istvan Jakab , acting head, Representation of the European Commission in Romania; Oana-Mihaela Mocanu , director general, EIR; Loredana Licuța , coordinator, EUROPE DIRECT Bucharest Information Centre, EIR; Oana Ștefăniță , PhD, lecturer, Faculty of Communication (and Public Relations), National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (NUPSPA); Miruna Covaci-Zăvoi , communication responsible, National Agency for Community Programmes in the field of Education and Vocational Training (NACPEVT); Cătălin Silvestru , PhD, associate professor, director, National Qualifications Authority (NQA), coordinator, EPALE National Support Service, EQF, Europass and Euroguidance; Karina Caramihai , executive secretary, National Council of Students
2	9.05.2021	Pupils, students, teachers, professors, NGOs, citizens	<i>“Europe dressed in new clothes” – Europe Day online event with Europe Direct Bucharest</i>	EIR, through EUROPE DIRECT Bucharest	European School Choir under the Cantus Mundi National Programme, pupils and teachers from schools in Bucharest and Ilfov County - “Elena Cuza” National College in Bucharest, Secondary school No. 113 in Bucharest, International Theoretical High School of Informatics Bucharest and Nuci Secondary school, Ilfov County
3	3.06.2021	Public institutions, NGOs, business environment, citizens	<i>What future do we want for the European Union at home and in the world?</i>	EIR and MFA	Iulia Matei , secretary of state for European Affairs/MFA; Oana-Mihaela Mocanu , director general, EIR; Lazăr Comănescu , ambassador, secretary general, Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation; Alina Bârgăoanu , PhD, professor, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest, president of the administrative board/EIR; Dan Luca , vice-president for Strategic Innovation, EURACTIV Brussels; Robert Lupițu , editor-in-chief, Caleaeuropeană.ro (moderator)

Summary of the events organised by the European Institute of Romania (EIR) in the margins of the Conference on the Future of Europe					
No.	Date	Target audience	Topic	Organiser	Guests/Speakers/Facilitators
4	22.06.2021	Senior citizens, NGOs	<i>"Technology with and for seniors" Workshop</i>	EIR, through EUROPE DIRECT Bucharest	Alexandra Dobre , director general, Centre for Seniors of Bucharest Municipality; Oana-Mihaela Mocanu , director general, EIR; Loredana Licuța , coordinator EUROPE DIRECT Bucharest, EIR; Irina Chirițoiu , director, European Consumers Centre Romania; Veronica Ștefan , founder, Digital Citizens Romania; Diana Ioniță , coordinator, Digital Portofolio, GEYC
5	7.07.2021	Pupils, teachers, NGOs, citizens	<i>The living library - "Digital World Stories"</i>	EIR, through EUROPE DIRECT Bucharest	Andreea Hanganu Necula , co-founder, Institute for Digital Government; Ioan Istrate , co-founder, CyBourn; Vlad Măcelaru , CEO and founder, ClarK Vision (Romania); Isabela Neague , partnerships & communication manager, Station Europe
6	9.07.2021	Public institutions, NGOs, business environment, citizens	<i>Dialogues@EIR: #digitalisation</i>	EIR	Oana-Mihaela Mocanu , director general, EIR; Mirela Mărcuț , PhD, lecturer, University of Oradea, founder, digitalpolicy.ro; Veronica Ștefan , founder, Digital Citizens Romania; Radu Puchiu , CEO, H.appy Cities; Flavia Durach , PhD, lecturer, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (moderator)
7	16.08.2021 – 19.08.2021	Pupils and students	<i>Summer School "No Pain to be Green" / "No loss if you are Green!"</i>	EIR, through EUROPE DIRECT Bucharest	Sorina Bunescu , trainer, CeRe Association, Partener pentru Tine Association; Loredana Licuța , coordinator, EUROPE DIRECT Bucharest Information Centre, EIR; Ionela Panait , information and communication expert, EUROPE DIRECT Argeș; Florian Păun , student, "I.L. Caragiale" National University of Theatre and Film, Bucharest, the Department of Photography

Summary of the events organised by the European Institute of Romania (EIR) in the margins of the Conference on the Future of Europe					
No.	Date	Target audience	Topic	Organiser	Guests/Speakers/Facilitators
8	15.09.2021	Pupils, students, teachers, professors, NGOs, citizens	<i>An event dedicated to #SOTEU 2021</i>	EIR, through EUROPE DIRECT Bucharest	Loredana Licuța , coordinator, EUROPE DIRECT Bucharest, EIR; Dan Drăghia , expert, Training and Projects Unit, EIR; Mihaela-Adriana Pădureanu , expert, European Studies Unit, EIR; Ionuț-Mircea Marcu , expert, European Studies Unit, EIR
9	28.09.2021	Public institutions, NGOs, business environment, citizens	<i>The post-pandemic economy</i>	EIR and MFA	Mihaela Ștefan-Simion , director general, Department for the European Union, MFA; Siegfried Mureșan , member of the European Parliament, Group of the European People's Party (EPP); Alina Bârgăoanu , PhD, Professor, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, president of the administrative board/EIR; Daniel Dăianu , member of the Romanian Academy, chairman of the Fiscal Council, PhD, professor, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration; Gabriela Drăgan , PhD, professor, Bucharest University of Economic Studies; Ciprian Stănescu , president, Social Innovation Solutions; Laura Marinaș , PhD, associate professor, Bucharest University of Economic Studies; Florian Neagu , deputy director, Financial Stability Department, National Bank of Romania; Eliza Vaș , expert, European Studies Unit, EIR (moderator)
10	5.10.2021	Pupils, teachers, NGOs, citizens	<i>Meet and Greet EUROPE DIRECT Bucharest! (which included a panel on the future of Europe)</i>	EIR, through EUROPE DIRECT Bucharest	Loredana Licuța , coordinator, EUROPE DIRECT Bucharest, EIR; Ioana Marchiș , national coordinator, EUROPE DIRECT Romania Network; Florentina Costache , head of unit / assistant to the director general, Communication Unit; Georgiana Chivescu , expert, Documentation Centre, EIR; Eliza Vaș , expert, European Studies Unit, EIR; Ionuț-Mircea Marcu , expert, European Studies Unit, EIR

Summary of the events organised by the European Institute of Romania (EIR) in the margins of the Conference on the Future of Europe					
No.	Date	Target audience	Topic	Organiser	Guests/Speakers/Facilitators
11	25.10.2021	Pupils, students, teachers, professors, NGOs, citizens	<i>The living library "Let's go green!"</i>	EIR, through EUROPE DIRECT Bucharest	Loredana Licuța , coordinator, EUROPE DIRECT Bucharest; Mihai Drăgan , director, Communication, Transparency and IT Directorate, the Ministry of Environment, Water and Forests, coordinator, Green Spider Network Romania; Ciprian Gălușcă , coordinator – Greenpeace campaign for forests and biodiversity, Greenpeace Romania; Mihai Dragolea , assistant professor, journalist specialised in documentary films; Tiberiu Boșutar , president, "Legea Codrului" NGO
12	26.10.2021	Public institutions, NGOs, business environment, citizens	<i>Educated Romania for a Europe of the Future</i>	EIR and MFA	Iulia Matei , secretary of state for European Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Oana-Mihaela Mocanu , director general, EIR; Ligia Deca , presidential adviser, Department of Education and Research, Presidential Administration; Felicia Săndulescu , coordinator, the team for "SELFIE for work-based learning" system, coordinator, the Working Group on Vocational Education and Training, 2020–2021 school year; Gelu Duminică , sociologist, executive director, „Împreună” – Agency for Community Development, educational adviser for the Council of Europe – INSCHOOL Project; Ana-Maria Anghelescu , expert, European Studies Unit, EIR (moderator)
13	27.10.2021	Pupils, students, teachers, professors, NGOs, citizens	<i>"What's New in EU?" interactive dialogue</i>	EIR, through EUROPE DIRECT Bucharest	Istvan Jakab , economic adviser, European Semester, Representation of the European Commission in Romania; Gabriela Drăgan , PhD, professor, Bucharest University of Economic Studies; Veronica Ștefan , founder, Digital Citizens Romania; Dan Croitoru , organiser, TEDx (moderator).
14	22.11.2021	Public institutions, NGOs, business	<i>Towards a European Health Union. Individual challenges, collective solution</i>	EIR and MFA	Iulia Matei , secretary of state for European Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Andrei Baci , secretary of state, Ministry of Health; Oana-Mihaela Mocanu , director general, EIR; Alina Bârgăoanu , PhD, Professor, National University of Political and Administrative Studies, Bucharest, president of the EIR Administrative Board; Vlad Mixich ,

Summary of the events organised by the European Institute of Romania (EIR) in the margins of the Conference on the Future of Europe					
No.	Date	Target audience	Topic	Organiser	Guests/Speakers/Facilitators
		environment, citizens			international expert on health policies, observer within the Management Board of the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work; Dr. Valeria Herdea , vice-president of the Romanian College of Physicians, president of the Romanian Association for Pediatric Education in Family Medicine; Dr. Ion-Gheorghe Petrovai , innovation director and co-founder of FreshBlood HealthTech – EITHealth RIS Hub for Romania; Diana Brâncuș , senior journalist, TVR News (moderator)
15	25.11.2021	Pupils, students, teachers and professors	<i>“What’s New in EU”? interactive dialogue, second edition</i>	EIR, through EUROPE DIRECT Bucharest	Carolina Novac , EU policy and regulation manager at National Grid and energy affiliate expert at Europuls; Maria Balea , researcher, Romanian Centre for European Policies; Andrei Popescu , coordinator, European Solidarity Corps
16	7.12.2021	Pupils, teachers, NGOs, citizens	<i>Online workshop “Rational consumption, intelligent way of life”</i>	EIR, through EUROPE DIRECT Bucharest	Ana Maria Răducanu , founder of Zero Waste Store; Vlad Surdea Hernea , PhD student of the Central European University Vienna; Marius Cobârzan , project manager at Open Fields Foundation
17	14.12.2021	Public institutions, NGOs, business environment, citizens	<i>EIR Annual Conference: “Romania’s sustainable economic recovery in the context of the double transition – green and digital”</i>	EIR and MFA	Mihaela Ștefan-Simion , director general, Department for the European Union, Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Alina Bârgăoanu , PhD, Professor, National University of Political and Administrative Studies, Bucharest, president of the EIR Administrative Board; Cornel Berteza Hanganu , adviser, Department of Sustainable Development, General Secretariat of the Government; Oana-Mihaela Mocanu , director general, European Institute of Romania; Dumitru Miron , PhD, Professor, Bucharest University of Economic Studies; Mihaela Ștefănescu , expert on circular economy, researcher in strategy and policy studies; Mirela Mărcuț , PhD, lecturer, University of Oradea, founder, digitalpolicy.ro; Gabriela Drăgan , PhD, professor, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, member of the EIR Consultative Scientific Board; Florin Bonciu , Professor PhD,

Summary of the events organised by the European Institute of Romania (EIR) in the margins of the Conference on the Future of Europe					
No.	Date	Target audience	Topic	Organiser	Guests/Speakers/Facilitators
					Romanian-American University, senior researcher, Institute for World Economy, member of the EIR Consultative Scientific Board; Eliza Vaș , expert, European Studies Unit, EIR (moderator)
18	16.12.2021	Pupils, teachers, NGOs, citizens	<i>Open space event — “Recycle, your gesture counts!”</i>	EIR, through EUROPE DIRECT Bucharest	Aurelia Chereji , senior lecturer, Faculty of Environmental Protection, University of Oradea; Mariana Stan , country coordinator, Fashion Revolution Romania; Mihail Tănase , communication specialist “Recycling Map”, Future Plus (NGO); Eliza Vaș , expert, European Studies Unit, EIR
19	17.02.2022	Public institutions, NGOs, business environment, citizens	<i>“The EU in the world: The relationship between the European Union and the US in the context of post-pandemic recovery and of tackling global challenges”</i>	EIR and MFA	Daniela Gîțman , Secretary of State for European Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Traian Hristea , Director General, Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Alina Bărgăoanu , PhD, Professor, National University of Political and Administrative Studies, Bucharest, president of the EIR Administrative Board; Oana-Mihaela Mocanu , director general, European Institute of Romania; Doru-Petrișor Frățescu , director and co-founder of VoteWatch Europe; Ionela-Maria Ciolan , Research Fellow, European Policy Centre (EPC); Mihai Sebe , Head of European Studies Unit, European Institute of Romania; Robert Lupițu , editor-in-chief, Calea Europeană (moderator)
20	9.03.2022	Public institutions, NGOs, business environment, citizens	<i>“The challenges for Romanian agriculture in the context of the EU’s ‘Farm to Fork’ Strategy and the new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)”</i>	EIR and MFA	Daniela Gîțman , Secretary of State for European Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Sorin Moise , Secretary of State, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development; Nicolae Istudor , PhD, Professor, rector of the University of Economic Studies; Oana-Mihaela Mocanu , director general, European Institute of Romania; Alexandra Popa , executive director, Romanian Centre for European Policies; Aurelia-Ioana Chereji , senior lecturer, University of Oradea; Ana-Maria Stancu , board member, euRobotics aisbl; Lucian Luca , deputy director, Institute of Agricultural

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No.	Date	Target audience	Topic	Organiser	Guests/Speakers/Facilitators
					Economics, Romanian Academy; Eliza Vaş , expert, European Studies Unit, EIR (moderator)