



Ollscoil Chathair
Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City University



DCU Centre for Religion, Human Values,
and International Relations

Brief on the Conference on the Future of Europe: Meeting at the Helix, Dublin City University

24th - 25th February 2022

Summary

The Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) is an initiative of the European Union launched on Europe Day, 9 May 2021. The CoFoE is a “bottom-up” project, engaging with EU citizens and civic society through a digital platform, local meetings, citizens’ panels, and other innovative approaches. The goal is to share ideas and help shape the medium-term future of the European Union. As part of the CoFoE initiative, a meeting was held in Dublin City University (DCU) on 24th and 25th of February 2022, with an objective to develop shared thinking on a number of public issues.

The February meeting brought together members of many different churches and faith communities and other invited guests. Participants drew on the report produced after preparatory online consultations on 2nd December 2021 (dcu.ie/religionand-humanvalue). Experts on European issues made keynote presentations. Working groups addressed eight different themes. The meeting concluded with a panel discussion among the representatives of different faith communities.

The report of this meeting is presented in four parts on the website of the Centre for Religion, Human Values, and International Relations. The first part of the report, under the heading “values and the future,” reflects our discussions on today’s disorientation and sense of danger in international affairs and on the other hand, the high-level values that should underpin the role of the European Union in peacebuilding. The second part summarises discussions in key policy areas – in particular, migration, housing, and the media and technology. The third part offers some preliminary thinking on the concepts and organisational principles that can encourage a mutually beneficial engagement by political leaders and other stakeholders with faith communities. The fourth part consists of recommendations, which are listed here in the brief.



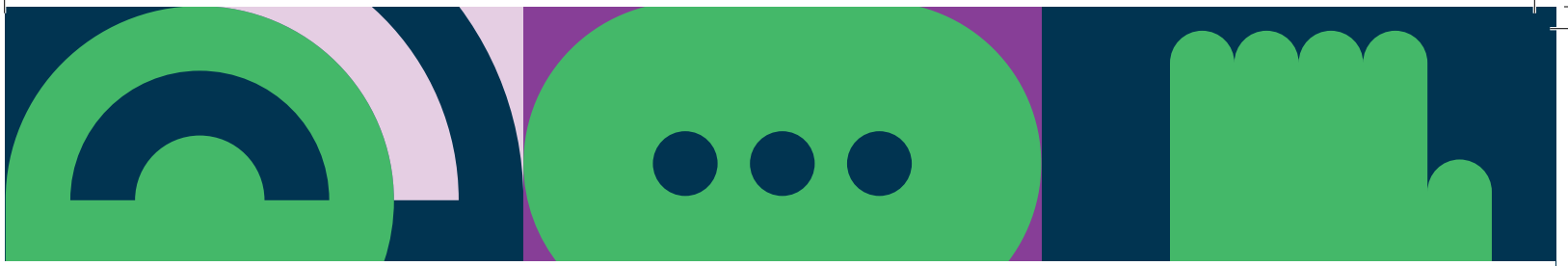
Captions

Front cover: Daire Keogh, Noelle O’Connell, John Neary

Above: Panel discussion chaired by Archbishop Michael Jackson -Speakers: Gillian Kingston, Bishop Brendan Leahy, Karen Jardine, Ahmed Hasain, Dr Hemant Kumar

To the right: Francis Jacobs





Nature of the Event

The event was officially opened at 2pm on Thursday, 24th February with speeches by the President of DCU, Professor Daire Keogh, and Noelle O'Connell, CEO of the European Movement and National Citizen Representative in the Conference on the Future of Europe. Keynote presentations were made by Francis Jacobs ("Founding values of post-war Europe"); Anne Barrington ("Housing and the future of Europe"); Jane Morrice ("the Good Friday Agreement approach to EU peacebuilding") Bishop Noel Treanor ("Conference on the Future of Europe"); and on the second day, by Catherine Day ("EU and Irish migration policies"). On day two of the meeting, welcoming speeches were made by Bishop Brendan Leahy (Irish Inter-Church Meeting), Archbishop Michael Jackson, chair of the Dublin City Interfaith Forum, and Derick Wilson (Corrymeela). To conclude the meeting, Archbishop Michael Jackson chaired a panel discussion among religious representatives. The panelists were: Gillian Kingston, Vice-President, World Methodist Council; Karen Jardine, Presbyterian Church in Ireland; Ahmed Hasain, Islamic Cultural Centre; Dr Hemant Kumar, Vedic Hindu Cultural Centre of Ireland; and Bishop Brendan Leahy.

Over the two days, working groups addressed the following themes:

1. Global challenges/World Social Summit 2025
2. Founding values of post-war Europe
3. Wellbeing indicators and an overall vision of the economy
4. Migration policies
5. Housing policy and the future of Europe
6. International security/The Good Friday Agreement approach to EU peacebuilding
7. The dialogue between faith communities and public authorities
8. The media, technology, and the future of Europe

Each working group had an appointed notetaker. The report is based on the written and oral contributions of a wide range of participants including the appointed note takers. The conclusions reflect a broad consensus.

Recommendations

The "soul of Europe" is to be discovered in action.

The sense of our meeting was that we need to oppose today's disorientation and sense of danger in international affairs with a commitment that goes in the opposite direction. It is more necessary than ever for all European citizens to reflect on our deepest values and the actions we can take to build a more socially and ecologically just world in which we see or "image" peace as the rightful possession of the human community as a whole. We must not lose perspective or allow our horizons to shrink. The future of the European Union will partly depend on our becoming "part of the solution" in this way.

A central, practical conclusion of our meeting is that public authorities should recognize that the granular provisions of the law depend on, and nurture in turn, a worldview and way of life. The "soul of Europe" is to be discovered in action, in the dialogical relationship between high-level values and practical politics.

We favour the continuation into the future of citizens' panels and other formats for dialogue developed within the Conference on the Future of Europe. In this context we look forward to a deeper dialogue within the framework of Article 17 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU).

Security / Peace

On the island of Ireland, we should be prepared to draw lessons on peacebuilding from our experience of the Good Friday Agreement. In this perspective, the meeting highlighted - among many other ideas - questions concerning long-term reconciliation and proportionality in the allocation of effort and resources. The meeting was favourable to the concept of organic peacebuilding. It was observed that the Russian invasion of Ukraine raises profound questions for the calibration of EU foreign, security, and defence policies. At the same time, the meeting noted that Ireland's military neutrality embodies values such as a commitment to work towards a global security community in the spirit of the UN Charter, a focus on disinterested deliberation, and a recognition that the term "defence" embraces a wide range of capabilities and practices that deserve to be examined case-by-case. We should not call into question the original character of the European Union as the world's leading peace project post-WWII.

Wellbeing

The meeting welcomed the fact that a number of jurisdictions, including Ireland and Northern Ireland, are exploring the development of "well-being frameworks" as a means of complementing the GDP metric and focusing on policy outcomes that will make our communities more equal, inclusive, and supportive. Society should value all work and all people in ways that the market alone can never achieve.

Migration

On migration, the churches and faith communities can help political leaders in national politics and the European institutions to develop a more consistent and ambitious strategy on migration as a European Union and global issue. We should face up to UN obligations and acknowledge that our society needs migrants for the skills they bring and the work that they do. The debate that we promote should encourage humane policies and act as a counter to narrow and nationalistic understandings of European identity.

Housing

On housing, the meeting considered that the Conference on the Future of Europe presents us with a real opportunity to look at the wider European and global frameworks which shape the facts on the ground, including strategies based on public investment in social housing. We identified four key channels through which the EU can help to address this challenge (See Part Three of the full report).

Media and Technology

Participants in the meeting did not dispute the important role played in many sectors by the gathering of data and the application of algorithmic systems to the analysis of information. However, technology can be turned in different directions. There are grounds for vigilance. The European Union can show leadership in shaping the global regulatory environment for digital as well as for other fast-moving, investment-driven technologies. We should steer technological development in a "human-centred" direction. The EU should take specific actions to address the dangers posed to democratic discourse by the new means of communication (See Part Three of the full report for detailed suggestions.).

Churches and Faith Communities

The view of participants was that churches, faith communities, and inter-faith fora should play an increasingly significant role in the dialogue on public issues. Our report offers ideas on the concepts and organisational principles that can encourage "mutual literacy" and mutually beneficial engagement by political leaders and other stakeholders with religious actors.

For more information:

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