DEBATE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

Final report

First session, on the 8th of December, in Bruges.

Seconde session, on the 20th of June, in Brussels.

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Born in 2020 from a common will of the College of Europe and the Institute of European Studies from the Université Libre de Bruxelles, the joint activity "Debates on the future of Europe" is designed to gather students from both institutions to debate on the current and future issues faced by the European Union. More than mere debates, the frame of this activity matches the ideals of excellence and innovative thinking of both institutions as the students participating produce ideas, propositions, that shall tackle these aforementioned issues.

The idea of this activity emerged in the wake of the Conference on the future of Europe, a unique pan-european and democratic exercise gathering thousands of European citizens across the continent to debate and make proposals. Contrary to the activity where the final propositions are for academic purposes — laid out in this report — the recommendations conceived by the citizens shall be reviewed by the three European institutions as they committed to produce formal proposals, of any necessary form, to reflect the will of the citizens.

For the 2021 edition, the delegations of the College of Europe and the IES met for a first round of debates at the campus of the College in Bruges while the second round of debates was hosted by the IES. Inspired by the first edition, and the actual COFOE, the students from both delegations divided themselves in five thematic panels in which they were tasked to review current legislation and needs of the EU to debate and make proposals: Resilient European societies; Democracy in the EU; Europe and the world; Strategic autonomy and defence and Migration.

The second session of debates included a conference with high-level speakers representing the worlds of academia, civil society and European institutions to discuss the process of the Conference on the future of Europe that ended on May, 9th. It was the occasion to exchange about the inputs of European citizens, the success and limits of the COFOE and the follow-up planned by the European commission in terms of legislative initiatives as well as the position of the European parliament and the Council. The speakers provided the students with insights, opinions and detailed analysis on the entire process. In spite of the criticism that might arise in the aftermaths of the Conference, the exercise as a whole was considered as an undeniable success as it allowed European citizens to make proposals on an unprecedented scale and during an entire year while involving the three institutions and stakeholders from the civil society in plenary sessions. Hence, the attempt of students from the College of Europe and the Institute for European Studies to reproduce this on a smaller scale.

Finally, in this report, the organizers of this activity lay out the content of the debates and the final propositions and discussions that emerged from each panel.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PANELS

Resilient European societies

The Covid-19 pandemic as well as the climate change crisis have recently shed light on the inability of European societies to face shocks of this intensity. The war in Ukraine, launched on February 24, has only emphasized the vulnerability of the EU, illustrated by its energetic and industrial dependance. The European institutions saw in the first conflict on the European soil since the end of the ex-Yugoslavia wars an opportunity for the Union to fasten the pace in the scaling out of fossil fuels and in the reduction of its greenhouse gas emissions. The pandemic and the war must not make the EU forget that climate change remains the biggest challenge it has ever faced with tremendous social and economic costs, internal and external displacements of millions of people and a massive degradation of the environment. It is therefore essential to develop common policies to tackle these issues.

Building resilient societies will be achieved by preventing shocks, managing health crises, by transforming European economies to give them the tools necessary to adapt. Such transition must be carried out with the help of digitalization in order to ensure the competitiveness of European economies, their ability to create jobs and innovation ; progress that will enable them to reduce their GHG emissions in the sectors of mobility, agriculture, energy, clothing…

The work of this panel therefore acknowledges the existing legislation, the Fit for 55 proposals and will make recommendations to pursue the objective of transition and adaptation to a new environment.

Democracy in the EU

Since its creation, the European Union has claimed to be a champion of democracy with its unique functioning illustrated by a pan-european representative democracy and through the promotion of democracy beyond European borders. However, within its very borders, democracy and the rule of law are challenged on a daily basis.

The Democracy in the EU panel addresses topics ranging from the rule of law, to representation and representativeness, or education to European citizenship Indeed, participants explained that improving the quality of democracy in the EU requires better education of citizens on the functioning of the European Union, the rights they possess thanks to their European citizenship. To another extent, the panel referred to the Conference on the Future of Europe as a promising initiative to improve the consideration of the opinions of European citizens.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PANELS

Europe and the world

When questioning Europe's place in the world, one must question its relationships with third countries, not only long-term allies such as the United States — whose relationship has known troubles under the Trump Presidency — but also with strategic partners or rivals, depending on the context and the issue, referring to

China for instance. In a multipolar world, European interests are in direct competition with other countries' in many respects. The EU is, by its very nature, a champion of multilateralism and defends a rules-based world outlook, an ideal that is not shared everywhere, leading to increasing tensions across the globe.

Involving trade relations, neighboring issues and also European influence and soft power on an international scale, the theme of this panel is rather large. This wide range of sub-topics were almost all discussed on the first day of the debate in December in Bruges. However, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the recent debates on the EU candidate status of Ukraine has refocused the debate for the June session. During the second round of debates, participants effectively exchanged views on the modalities of the EU's enlargement policy, its paradoxes and inconsistencies in the matter.

Strategic autonomy and defence

The Russian aggression in Ukraine recently brought back the reality of war in Europe, something that the European Union had forgotten since the last conflict in ex-Yugoslavia. Today, more than ever, as the world grows multipolarized, it is necessary for the European Union to become more autonomous, in terms of strategy, defence and industry. With the support of its long term allies and by working hand in hand with NATO, the EU must find a way to decide its own fate and to become less vulnerable to potential crises that might affect its societies and interests scattered across the world. Therefore, strategic autonomy must be achieved, at least, on two subjects: industrial autonomy and security.

First, the Covid-19 pandemic underlined the European dependance to foreign industries and production. This dependence was known and encouraged at the beginning of the 21th century, with the multiplication of exchanges and the externationalization of production and costs, but it becomes problematic when it starts to concern essential goods to protect European populations. The pandemic showed that an external shock, whether homogeneous or hitting a single partner, can disrupt supply chains and put at risk entire economies as well as the health of European citizens. The European strategic autonomy plan fits in with the will to make the EU autonomous in the production of a list of essential goods and products, notably medical capacities and to re-localize some industries. The discussion in the frame of this panel therefore allows the students to make proposals related to the industrial strategic autonomy of the Union.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PANELS

Second, strategic autonomy must also come to life with regard to the Union's allies who also have their own interests to defend, as stated in the presentation of the previous panel. Hence the need for the EU to develop a common security and defence policy to protect its interests in Europe and to no longer be subjugated to the will of the US and to the threats formulated by Russia. Finally, this panel allows students to think about the Union's autonomy in terms of democracy protection, (des)information, and a reinforcement of its cybersecurity capacities as we have seen with the war in Ukraine that the conflict also displays a strong aspect of communication, with the role of social media.

Migration

Since the so-called "migrant crisis" in 2015, migration has been a burning issue more than ever for the European union. Since 2015-2016, thousands of migrants have died desperately trying to escape their country — sometimes located in war zones — by crossing the Mediterranean Sea or have been the victims to human trafficking. Moreover, the European asylum system and the rule of the first country have led to many disagreements among the Member states with countries such as Italy or Greece facing waves of migration while other countries refused to welcome refugees, thus refusing their share of the responsibility of the Union. More recently, Belarus and Russia have instrumentalized migration at the Polish border to put pressure on the EU, months before the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. The Russian aggression has generated an unprecedented amount of migration movement in recent history, something not seen since the end of World war II.

The European Union has therefore the duty to reform its asylum policy to ensure that all refugees, Ukrainian or not, are properly being taken care of and that no one is left behind. Whether it has to deal with short-term refugee or long-term migrant wishing to find a better life in the EU by contributing in its economy, the EU must put an end to the indignation of the refugees camps at its borders, must reform the first country system putting enormous pressure on its peripheric Member states and must work toward greater inclusion for new members of its society.

CONFERENCE: CoFoE insights

On June 20th, the Université Libre de Bruxelles hosted a conference in the frame of the joint activity of the College of Europe and Institute of European Studies. Four speakers were invited: Gaëtane Ricard-Nihoul from the European Commission and Guillaume McLaughlin from the European Parliament, representing the European institutions, Ward Den Dooven from the Democratic Society organization and Federico Maria Terreni from the European Movement International. The guests provided participants of the activity and attendants of the conference insights on the process of the Conference on the future of Europe following its ending on May 9th. Each successively presented their role in the Conference, the work they did to ensure its success, discussed the criticism and the achievements of the exercises as well as the follow-up, while Martina Rubino from the Institute of European Studies moderated the discussion.

Several themes and issues related to the Conference were tackled in this discussion. About the visibility of the entire exercise, although all speakers agreed on the fact that the Conference was mostly overlooked, barely covered by national media and politics, the Conference was an undeniable success. According to them, it has the potential to bolster the action of the EU, to provide a new direction and it received more attention toward the end with the publication of the final report.

One of the main topics of the discussion and the Q&A session with the participants was Treaty change. This question arose during the elaboration of the Conference by the French President and during the discussions between the institutions. The European Parliament was quick to ask for deep reform of the EU and the European Commission said that if such reform was asked by the citizens — and, especially, needed — then it would make a proposition in this sense and/or support an initiative from the Parliament. Nevertheless, regarding the proposals made by the citizens in the frame of the COFOE and as stated in its communication, the Commission underlined that most proposals could be implemented through existing or planned legislation, when they are actually related to the EU's competences. Treaty change concerns therefore a small part of proposals but remains a significant issue of the Conference that still has to be debated after the examination of the Parliament's initiative asking for the creation of a Convention for Treaty change.

In terms of ambitions, the speakers pointed that the Conference exceeded the expectations of the institutions as the plenary sessions allowed for constructive, relevant and comprehensive debates between citizens and institutions representatives. The COFOE allowed for a good representativeness of the European citizens, thanks to the use of sortition based on a few key criteria such as: age, nationality, gender balance, socio-economic backgrounds. Even citizens that had never dealt with European policies before participated wholeheartedly and euroscepticism was not, in the end, determining in the participation. Thus, the argument that good representation is hard to reach when people are randomly selected was not verified here.

CONFERENCE: CoFoE insights

However, civil society organizations reported that for future participative exercises similar to the Conference, for instance, people with disabilities should be more included. Regarding the inclusion, the wish to include youth accounting for one third of all participants was respected.

Finally, as the representative of the European institutions emphasized that the Conference was designed to address the lack of citizen engagement, even more significant in a time of crisis with the pandemic in which democratic processes are momentous, Mr. Maria Terreni argued that the Conference had played a role for their inclusion. He added that citizens whom are not usually heard could be heard thanks to sortition, without answering the everlasting democratic deficit of the EU. However, the speakers insisted on the necessary variety of participatory tools to ensure the maximization of participation. The Conference included a digital platform gathering hundreds of thousands of contributions from the twenty-seven European countries, allowing for more voices to be heard. Nonetheless, it was recognized that institutions couldn't address each contribution and that the tools at hand had to be improved in an innovative way to reach each and every citizen.

PANEL 1: Resilience of European Societies

After briefly resuming their previous exchanges in December, the participants returned to their work on the main themes: the twin transitions (digital and the European Green Deal) and the protection of health. They highlighted the fact that these issues were underpinned by both economic and social concerns, challenging the resilience of European societies.

European Green deal

The green transition appears to be a tricky issue because even though it is a noble cause, the targets set are still tailored to the West and disconnected from those in the East. Indeed, participants stressed the difference in infrastructure and capacity within the EU. Therefore, they argued for a better redistribution from West to East.

Moreover, they were concerned about the lack of financial resources allocated to policies laid out in the European Green Deal and its subsequent "Fit for 55" legislative package, given the huge number of issues that are covered to lower the greenhouse gas emissions for 2030 and 2050. They highlighted the need to increase the funds allocated to the implementation of these policies while advocating for a simultaneous increase in the targets set.

Finally, the members of the panel explained that the regulatory character of the EU could be partly effective, but that for a broader vision, it was also essential to invest in communication for a better social acceptance of the green transition by European societies.

The discussion allowed the participants to draw the following remarks and recommendations:

1. The EU should increase the amount of the Structural and Cohesion Funds as well as the Just Transition Fund while providing a higher level of scrutiny on the way money is spent.
2. The EU could proceed to a reversed performance funding where member states will have to choose between 3 target menus with different levels of ambition, depending on their own progress towards their goals. Thus, the redistribution principle will be: the higher the target chosen, the more money they get.
3. The EU should provide wider administrative help to member states.
4. In order to level up the European targets' ambition for the Green Deal, the EU could increase the digital levy, the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism as well as the BEFIT instrument (Business in Europe: Framework for Income Taxation).

Digital

In a second phase, the participants discussed the digital transition. Another key priority outlined in the 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework is the digitalisation of the EU, a crucial issue to ensure the competitiveness of European companies against third countries such as the US or China. Thus, because of the increased competition and the strategic dimension of digital issues, the participants stressed the European institutions' responsibility to legislate in this area to ensure European digital sovereignty.

In this respect, the participants proposed the following resolutions:

1. The EU should guarantee its effective data sovereignty by implementing solid legislation to harmonize rules and ensure a fair access and use of data.
2. The EU should secure a thorough implementation of the Digital Education Act to ensure a well-functioning digital education ecosystem. This also requires the training and education of the current generation on digital issues.

Health

Finally, the group discussed the latest challenge facing European companies: the Covid pandemic. The last few years have indeed tested the resilience of national health systems, and the solidarity between Member States. The nature of the pandemic has made the EU a central player in coordinating strategies to mitigate the consequences and the spread of the virus. However, it has also revealed logistical and political weaknesses at both national and European levels.

For the latter, here are a few recommendations:

1. The EU and Member States could consider making health a shared competence in order to improve the coordination of Europe-wide strategies in the medical field. This treaty change seems justified as the nature of pandemics makes them more of a transnational issue where Member State borders become less relevant.
2. The EU should reinforce medical degrees harmonization and facilitate mobility for medical staff.
3. In more concrete terms, the EU should organize the sharing of the Personal Product Equipment.

PANEL 2: Democracy in the EU

This second panel is about the state and functioning of European democracy. As it has been challenged in recent years, notably by Poland and Hungary which have declared themselves to fit in the new illiberal wave, through questions of the independence of justice, the persistent existence of corruption and misuse of taxpayers money, students from this panel have been discussing the ways to make European democracy more real, to protect it. Furthermore, when talking about European democracy, one also thinks about the democratic deficit lying between the European institutions and the European citizens, a deficit caused by a sense of weak representation, a lack of transparency, a lack of interest in the EU functioning and daily activities. Thus, the participants of this panel have narrowed this wide topic into three sub-topics which they discussed: education, representation and the rule of law.

Education

Education is one of the first ideas that came to their mind when asking themselves how to improve the quality of European democracy. They consider that in order to be interested and to participate in the democratic, and public, life of the EU, European citizens must be informed. Although the EU does not possess competences on education, it still finances programmes and projects related to education, such as Erasmus. Moreover, through the soft convergence of policies related to education, the EU has managed to develop plans to improve education across the continent, especially regarding higher education (with increased cooperation between universities). The Bologna Plan is an example of that.

The students thought of a few solutions to tackle the lack of education when it comes to the EU:

1. Increase the cooperation of Member states at the educational level, especially regarding middle and high schools.
2. Launch projects to finance school trips to Brussels so students can learn more about the action of the EU.
3. Instead of Europe Day, Member states could host a European Week (or at least a few days), in every city to promote the action of the EU and spread knowledge about it.

Representation

In order to fill the so-called democratic deficit that has characterized the European Union since the Maastricht Treaty (unknown and far leaders, lack of transparency, complexity of the decision-making process…), the European institutions have tried multiple times to bring the citizens closer to the EU. One of the best examples is the European citizen's initiative, intending to involve more European citizens in the creation of legislation. However, the deficit is still there and students of this panel thought of different ways the EU could fill this gap:

1. Encourage the development of forums and conferences on the model of the Conference on the future of Europe, especially the different events that took place across the EU. Such events and forums shouldn't necessarily bring binding outcomes or reforms of the EU but are mostly intended to encourage the participation of European citizens in the public debate. If created, these events should encore the broader inclusivity possible, especially for people with disabilities that were not sufficiently represented at the Conference on the future of Europe.

2. Support a debate among the European institutions about participatory tools. One of them being EU-wide referenda. However, it is a risky tool, creating more division and likely to polarize society, with only YES/NO answers to complex issues. The participants of this panel suggest the launch of wider consultations instead of "simple" referenda.
3. Reintroduce the Spitzenkandidaten process in order to make the head of the European executive truly chosen and elected by the people through the European parliament. But it must be accompanied by more communication in Member states on the issues of the elections, the differences between parties, as representation must go hand in hand with participation.

Rule of Law

The final subtopic tackled by the students in the Democracy in the EU panel was the issue of rule of law. It is at the basis of democracy in European countries as it guarantees rights, protects minorities, ensures the independence of justice… However, it is challenged on a daily basis. The European Union should therefore use its wide range of tools, policies and norms to enforce the rule of law across the Union as it will bolster throughput legitimacy for the EU through transparency, accountability, and lead to more participation. Here are a few ideas to protect the rule of law in Europe:

1. The rule of law may not be easy to describe and its concept may change according to case laws, it is essential that the primacy of EU laws over national legislations is respected and enforced by the European institutions.
2. Explore new ways to enforce the rule of law rather than cutting funds and the conditionality mechanism. In times of crises, cutting funds might reinforce economic difficulties, leading to shocks that will be spread to the entire Union. Cutting funds must be the final option of the European institutions.
3. As of today, the EU can only act after a breach of the rule of law (e.g., after a law breaching the rule of law is voted), making it immensely more difficult for the Council and the Commission to take preventive measures against such breaches. They must explore new methods to increase and improve their awareness capacity of any risk of a breach.

PANEL 3: Europe in the world

This panel aims to debate Europe's place in the world. During the second session of debates, the students from both delegations decided to narrow down the topic and focus on the neighborhood policy as well as the issue of enlargement. Another issue tackled by the students was the European normative power in bilateral economic agreements and the multilateral system.

EU: neighbourhood and enlargement

During their discussion, the participants noticed the lack of a common and coherent vision between Member states: while some think about the enlargement as a rational process that brings economic and strategic gains, others have a more utopist outlook and romanticize the idea of an united European family.

The war in Ukraine has reignited these debates opposing the two perspectives, particularly when the Balkans expressed their willingness to join the EU as well. There has been a new questioning of the relationship between the EU and its neighbors, exemplified by the proposition of Macron of creating a 'European political community' to share common values and objectives. But the adherence of new countries can trigger new divides between Member states, related to the acceptance of some countries while others stay out. This is exacerbated by the unanimity rule that needs all member states onboard for a new enlargement, leading to intense discussions and compromises. This rather long process can potentially further weaken the EU internally, but also externally, in the eyes of the other actors such as the US, China or Russia.

Moreover, the EU grounds its influence and power within its neighborhood on its 'innate' attractiveness, for instance the European way of life and the Single market. But this strategy has its limits, specifically in the Balkans where local populations are not aware of the EU's interventions in the development of their countries.

The discussion allowed the participants to draw the following remarks and recommendations:

1. The EU could try to mediate between Bulgaria and Northern Macedonia, as well as between France and Albania. This would accelerate the integration process, and allow the two candidates to enter negotiations surrounding their future within the Union. This could also help to create a healthier competition between the two candidates, and push them to reform their system more efficiently.
2. The EU shouldn't take its attractivity for granted and should establish a more solid communication strategy to open a more efficient and informative dialogue with the neighboring populations, about what role the EU could play for them.
3. A reappraisal of the enlargement policy, as well as a reflection on the ongoing negotiations with the current candidate countries, must take place before granting candidate status to Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.
4. The EU should try and bring its declarations closer to its possibility of action, as proven by the Ukrainian example.

PANEL 3: Europe in the world

Normative power in economic bilateral agreements and the multilateral system

Moreover, the participants wanted to draw several recommendations based on international economic problems that have been discussed in their panel. Firstly, the EU uses economic sanctions as a tool to impose its power on a case by case basis, but there is no specific regime nor structure. Secondly, while the EU is an active member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), it is currently being blocked by the United States on trade issues and their refusal to nominate the competent authorities to review trade complaints and cases. Thirdly, economic competition on the international scene is fierce, and the BRICS take more and more space and the UE is left behind. Finally, every bilateral agreement is negotiated separately, but there is no model to adapt to a majority of cases.

Therefore, their recommendations on that matter are:

1. The EU should contribute to development cooperation in more depth, using its normative power. Export the European model and agree on common principles and values, as with the recent agreement with ASEAN.
2. The EU should continue its negotiating efforts with the US to break the WTO deadlock.
3. The EU could establish a structured economic sanctions regime that can be applied when necessary, to avoid acting on a case-by-case basis, and to support and promote the values it intends to defend.
4. The EU could step up its investments to avoid being left behind too much by the BRICS countries and remain competitive on the international scene.

PANEL 4: Strategic autonomy and defence

Between the two rounds of debates, much happened on the geopolitics scale. The war in Ukraine broke out, the recovery plans came into life, doping the consumption and supporting the economies to reconnect with growth. However, the new waves of the pandemic, especially in China, coupled with strong 0 Covid policy led to disrupt in the supply chains, inviting the European leaders to fasten the development of industrial autonomy. As the energy crisis brought by the war in Ukraine fully hit the European Union in Spring, the necessity to deal with the war quickly appeared as the the top priority for the discussions of this panel. Moreover, the proposals emerging from the Conference on the Future of Europe and the legislative proposals of the Commission largely covered the energy aspects of the crisis.

Thus, the debates within this debate allowed the students to make two propositions with a few measures in each.

Strengthening the capacity of the EU to protect its strategic sites.

The new character of warfare, emphasized in Ukraine, showed how conflicts display various interdependent aspects to attack or protect: military, economic, cyber, alimentary… While Russia sent its troops on Ukrainian soil, it also used the trade of energy and food as potential tools to threaten Ukraine and its allies, effectively gaining the support of populations and third countries on the communication plan. In the meantime, strategic infrastructures as well as governance structures were targeted by cyberattack in Ukraine. The same thing happened in the European Union even in a state of peace. There is therefore a significant urge for the EU to protect its strategic sites and infrastructures. This should be achieved thanks to several measures:

1. Reforming existing intelligence agencies ENISA and EU intelligence to make them more transparent and to enhance cooperation.

With the complexification and the diversification of transnational threats, notably on energy and electric grids and networks, nuclear plants — as seen during the early days of the Russian aggression in Ukraine — and through cyberattacks, there is an increasing need for European countries and allies to share intelligence and increase cooperation. This can be achieved by a reform of the European Union Intelligence and Situation Center and the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA) that would allow for synergies and bridges to be built between the two organizations.

2. Increasing the funding of intelligence agencies to finance the formation of cybersecurity experts and invest in relevant technologies to protect internal EU communications.

While the EU must strengthen its capacity to protect its borders and strategic infrastructures, it must also think about the safety of its own internal communications. Recently, the Pegasus software case showed how vulnerable decision-makers and leaders were to spying softwares. This cannot be allowed to continue if the European Union intends to become more independent. Moreover, cyberattacks are increasingly complex, therefore the EU needs to increase its capacity to mitigate those threats. This can be achieved by better funding of the intelligence and cybersecurity agencies as well as the investment in the relevant technologies to protect the EU.

3. Strengthening the protection of energy sites against cyberattacks.

The war in Ukraine displayed the tremendous vulnerability of energy sites and infrastructures such as nuclear plants. While the EU must develop its capacity to share intelligence and prevent such attacks, it must be able to counter them as well. This means enabling experts in cybersecurity to test, monitor, adapt if necessary, the protection of said sites.

Assessing and reinforcing the capacity of the European Union to defend its borders

Along with the rising multiform threats of economic, energetic and cyber warfares, there is the need for the EU to be able to better assess and protect its borders and to face new potential crises. The war in Ukraine showed that the conflict is also about communication, information, public opinion, with a theater of war taking place on social networks and through media. Therefore, fighting desinformation has become a necessity. The measures thought by the students are:

1. Mutualizing the intelligence and disinformation capacity of the European Union intelligence and the Situation Center along with an increase in the use of the EU Hybrid toolbox.

As stated in the first measure of the first proposition, mutualizing the intelligence is a necessity for the EU and its allies. This should also be achieved in the field of disinformation as it has become an increasingly used tool in hybrid conflicts. To tackle these issues, the use of the EU Hybrid toolbox should be generalized, with trainings, harmonization of legislation on desinformation and regulation of social networks.

2. Strengthening the European Deployment Capacity.

The European Deployment Capacity is a recent initiative to develop a joint European defense capacity. As such, it is nearly not as sufficient as the situation requires. The individuals composing this capacity should be able to operate within and at the borders of the EU, creating synergies with the Frontex agency to assess threats at the borders and coordinating the European response in case of aggression, especially hybrid aggression such as cyberattacks as said above. Within this capacity, experts and trainers should be deployed to propose training for national military and administrative staff on the subjects of cybersecurity, intelligence, border management…

3. Mutualizing of weaponry and equipment purchase.

As shown during the pandemic crisis, the European Union could act quicker and in a more efficient way when it mutualizes the costs and when coordinating the response to a crisis. Just like the vaccines, the students suggest that the European Defense Fund could be used to buy military equipment in common to lower the costs. This includes cybersecurity technology, defense systems, vehicles… The Fund should also be able to monitor the stocks of said equipment, assess the needs with the European Deployment Capacity and ensure its repartition in case of any type of aggression. They should also work on common standards of production for the use of defense equipment or other by any military capacity (common standards on language, functioning…).

PANEL 5: Migration

The last Migration panel continued the discussions started in December, and decided to focus on the thorny issue of relocation. Indeed, since their first meeting, the participants mentioned the shift in the position of some Member States on the subject (Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia). Furthermore, they noted that the war in Ukraine and the issue of Ukrainian refugees has changed the established pattern of migration management in Europe, notably with the introduction of temporary protection for one year for Ukrainians fleeing the conflict. This measure, while indeed rather encouraging, raises questions about the vision of migration in Europe. Why was it not implemented before and with populations other than Ukrainian refugees? The CoFoE's conclusions were discussed but the participants decided to go further, as they were not considered sufficiently comprehensive. All these discussions led the participants of the fifth panel to question the definition of refugees and to reflect on the relocation system and the European solidarity mechanism.

Refugee status

On the question of the definition of refugee status, rather than making a concrete recommendation, participants wanted to draw attention to the fact that these are refugees and asylum seekers. By distinguishing them from other categories of migrants, they emphasize that these people are fleeing from a life-threatening situation and recognise that they have no other choice but to migrate.

Solidarity mechanism

The EU has set up a solidarity mechanism to manage the arrival of migrants, and to avoid that the entire cost of hosting them falls on the first countries of arrival such as Greece or Italy. However, the last few years have shown the weaknesses of this system, against which the participants made the following recommendations:

1. The UE should strengthen the solidarity mechanism by making it binding. Every Member State has to welcome migrants, the voluntarism dimension is no longer relevant.
2. If a Member State cannot accept sufficient refugees, it must be able to justify this to the Commission. And the Commission must establish and confirm the effective incompetence of the Member State.
3. The EU could implement a reward mechanism for Member States fully complying and respecting the solidarity mechanism to foster proactivity.

Relocation system

Finally, regarding the relocation system of refugees from arrival to other Member States, the panelists recommended the following propositions in order to maximize its effectiveness.

1. The distribution of migrants between the Member States should be based on: 1) population size 2) GDP. A minimum reception quota is established for each Member State.
2. The Commission proposal to establish a maximum delay of 4 weeks to proceed a procedure should be respect in order to avoid delays and an increase number of people in the hotspots

CONCLUSION

Finally, all participants, professors and students coordinators agreed on the success of the 2nd edition of the Debate on the Future of Europe. Both sessions, in Bruges then in Brussels, resulted in a relevant and well-argumented exchange on all the issues previously mentioned. Furthermore, these meetings were an opportunity for the participants of both delegations to bond during convivial moments.

We, Antoine Ichas, Jeanne Fabreguettes and Martina Rubino, as student coordinators, of, respectively, the Collège of Europe and the Institute for European Studies, would like to thank everyone who contributed to the success of this joint event.

Ward Den Dooven, Guillaume McLaughlin, Gaëtane Ricard-Nihoul and Federico Maria Terreni for their participation in the morning conference and all the interesting insights they provided us.

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And finally, we warmly thank all the participants who have been involved throughout the year in their panels to allow this high quality debate.

- **Panel 1 - Resilience of European societies**
- Thibault Besnier, Pierre Miller, Nicolas Rocher, Mateusz Stanczyk, Sofia Viviani.

- **Panel 2 - Democracy in the EU**
- Ismael Boughaba, Weronka Kryszak, Maria-Alexandra Mihăilă, Sara Musciumarra and Ilaria Vanzanelli.

- **Panel 3 - Europe in the world**
- Erwan Cherfaoui, Camilla Collet, Vittorio Ruocco, Louise Tydgadt and Oliva Van Havre.

- **Panel 4 - Strategic autonomy and defence**
- Margherita Antonelli, Noémie Berthier, Antoine Ichas, Paula Notivoli Cabezas and Fausto Scaldaferri.

- **Panel 5 - Migration**
- Marco Caragnano, Aoife Curtin, Pavel Dostalík, Ruben Hirsh and Martina Siclari.

We really look forward to the next edition of the Debate on the Future of Europe, next year !