



**Progress Report - The Conference on the Future of Europe**

Activities carried out by the European Institute of Romania

(April-November 2021)

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**Views from Romanian citizens**

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### 1. Introduction

The European Institute of Romania (EIR) 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 the citizens of Romania in the debate on current European affairs. Therefore, the EIR engages actively in **the promotion of the Conference on the Future of Europe** and the organisation of related thematic events. To facilitate the connection between decision-makers and citizens, **the EIR has worked closely with MFA, with which it organised a series of events on several topics, such as the future of the European Union, digitalisation, economic recovery, education and health.**

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. **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. A series of interactive workshops, information sessions and events for the public have been initiated and carried out, dedicated to topics such as digitalisation, climate change, education, transport, the future of Europe.

Given the pandemic context, almost all the events were held online, ensuring the participation of **citizens** from different regions of Romania. The **events**, which took place from **22 April to 22 November 2021**, were attended by pupils and students, teachers, young professionals, senior citizens, representatives of central and local institutions, business people, and representatives of non-governmental organisations, citizens interested in EU affairs and in EU's future. 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 (themselves) 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 **very optimistic (17%) and optimistic (60%)**. A question was also asked about **the challenges they considered to**



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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. Main topics for discussion**

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 listed as priority for debates in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe. Thus, most of the actions undertaken have been associated with the double green and digital transition, with an emphasis on citizens' opinions and interests.

**The methodology for organising** communication and information **events** and associated debates included the following steps: identifying the priority theme, drawing up a list of speakers/facilitators, creating and launching a public call for registration, centralising the confirmations received and sending the connection details necessary to join a Zoom meeting, live-streaming the events on Facebook (when the format allowed it) and preparing a post-event report. More information about related materials can be found on the website of [the European Institute in Romania](#) and of [EUROPE DIRECT Bucharest](#). Moreover, *Annex 1* includes the summary of events and logistic information.

Regarding the **methodology for extracting the conclusions, the comments and the ideas expressed** by citizens, the following steps were taken: centralising all information and data related to the events in one place, 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).

#### **2.1. Opinions on digitalisation and digital transformation**

One of the topics that was frequently mentioned at the EIR events is digitalisation, together with 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 from the multilingual platform of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

As a result, the ideas and comments expressed by the Romanian citizens on digitalisation/digital transformation include the following:

- 1.** In Romania, a paradigm change is necessary, as there is still much debate about digitalisation, while the trends go towards the digital transition/transformation



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(which involves *i.a.* a process of changing the way of thinking and organising processes in both private and public sectors, automating certain processes etc.).

2. Human capital is the essence of digitalisation, and, in this area, Romania faces a problem related to the required large scale development of the digital skills.
3. The problem is not always related to the access to technology/Internet (as Romania received a good score as regards the connectivity dimension or the 4G/5G coverage), but rather to the understanding of how people's skills should be developed to be able to use existing infrastructure and programmes.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. It is still uncertain how many eGovernment services are available in Romania (there is an ongoing indexing process), mainly because these services were developed without a "grand design".
7. 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 use digital tools, and identifying the skills they need to develop.
8. Digitalisation is expected to reduce the costs, but we should also consider the expenses induced by this process (additional resources for the development of adapted skills and the purchase of new technologies).
9. Digital transformation cannot lead to long-term changes without a multilevel governance structure that facilitates the process of public policymaking (in Romania, many decisions continue to be made according to the top-down model).
10. Expanding digital literacy will generate social transformation and accelerate innovation processes.
11. Unlike the central public administration, more oriented to maintaining bureaucratic procedures, the administrations at local level offer better conditions for citizens' involvement in digitalisation processes. These local authorities should seize the opportunity and be more proactive.
12. Romanian cities tend to become smart, yet without using data (not necessarily at public policy level, but in terms of simple decisions that are not made based on data) and without involving the people (using local intelligence to address community issues).
13. 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.



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14. 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.
15. The pandemic increased the need for continuous training for teachers, who expressed their wish to have access to high-quality free courses, to enable them to better respond to the challenges posed by digital transformation.
16. The pandemic has accelerated pre-existing global trends: digital transformation, climate change, the emergence of the G2 world (order) (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.
17. Technology is a tool for 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 regards the *advantages and disadvantages of the digital transformation* of the Romanian economy, the following ideas and comments were drawn:

a) advantages: the EU membership and its impact on an integrated digital economy, transformation facilitated by funds allocated under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP), models of best practices, 5G and 6G networks, AI (artificial intelligence).

b) disadvantages: the low capacity to attract highly qualified human resources, the high degree of bureaucracy and political instability, but also the economic structure.



**A comment from the citizens:** to make a “European Digital Identity wallet” that includes all necessary documents for citizens

### 2.2. Opinions on climate change and the environment

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

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

1. The persisting perception is that digital transformation and the European Green Deal are not sufficiently high on the agenda, although the EU 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 would have a direct impact on Romania.



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3. People do not see the benefits of the liberalisation of energy prices in the short term, given the fact that they are facing a significant increase in their energy bills.
4. It is important to apply a decarbonisation policy that fully takes into consideration the situation of countries like Romania that also rely on the energy from coal mining.
5. If wood may no longer be used for heating, alternative solutions must be urgently identified, so that vulnerable consumers are not endangered.
6. Romania needs measures to improve air quality, to protect the forests (such as limiting deforestation, which is very important) and to promote greening actions.
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 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, information availability, raising awareness about the impact of climate change (the National Bank of Romania developed a risk dashboard).
9. An orderly transition is essential because companies classified as carbon intensive companies generate more than 40% of their added value and hold more than 50% of the assets in the economy.
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 allow the provision of up-to-date information on environmental preservation to educational institutions, and to engage the young generation in environmental protection, responsible recycling and waste reduction, in order to protect the environment and secure a “green” future in 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 not see only the bright side of things. They should be aware of the truth when it comes to the environment. To form an objective opinion on this subject, children must learn from the mistakes of past generations, and visit Maramureş, for example, where they can be in touch with reality and have the opportunity to see a forest area that has been cleared and that will never be restored; this could help them 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.





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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 aware of its benefits.



**A comment from the citizens (Irina, 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 coming years. The proposals submitted on this topic 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 help achieving climate objectives.
5. Improving and promoting railway transportation so that it becomes an attractive alternative for people using their cars.
6. Funding is needed for the development of Romania's road and railway infrastructure, and these funds must be spent more transparently than before.

### 2.3. Opinions on economic recovery

During both dedicated events and 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 the areas in which projects related to the NRPP will be implemented. To address this need, the EIR invited a number of policy makers who provided factual information about citizens' information needs. These aspects can be included in *A stronger economy, social justice and jobs* topic from the multilingual platform of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

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





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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 when facing 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 EU's budget 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 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.
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 [subsequently approved by the EU Council]. 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 multiple disappointments in the event of lower performance in the implementation of the envisaged reforms. The way in which the funds are spent is very important and it is necessary to follow the EU 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. Scenarios run based on previous contracting and absorption rates, while maintaining the same usage profile and additional resources as in the case of Multiannual Financial Framework, show that there is little chance of reaching the 70% contracting rate at the end of 2022.
10. Romania will also benefit from 46 billion euros funds from the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework, for which the allocations for the Cohesion Policy



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and the Common Agricultural Policy are very important, and which will allow Romania to move closer to achieving convergence with the European average.

11. Under the NRRP, 30 billion euros were allocated to Romania, a part of them depending on the extent to which the economy will be affected in the period 2021-2027.
12. The pandemic continues to generate uncertainty and the pandemic economy might last longer than the post-pandemic economy.
13. 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 the intelligence of the people.
14. A national study carried out in August 2021 shows a high degree of uncertainty among respondents (entrepreneurs), which, together with the political instability, is blocking the perspective of reforms.

### 2.3.1. Opinions on social justice and jobs

The aspects related to social justice and jobs are closely linked to economy. They have been 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 proposals from the citizens referred to the following aspects:

1. The national minimum wage is at the limit of subsistence for many European citizens and there is a need to align the countries that are lagging (such as Romania) with the level of European wages.
2. To train the necessary labour force for the economy and to embolden the society to progress at the same speed as that of the European partners, we need changes in the Romanian education system. Some of them are reflected in the *Educated Romania* project, such as these general directions: increasing curricular relevance in 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 to strengthen training poles in centres with diversified economies, through non-tertiary education. Thus, young people from mono-industrial areas will not be limited in their career prospects and this will allow them to take 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. We can imagine a pole for automotive industry in Craiova or a pole for IT in Cluj or a pole in Timișoara, closely linked to the economic environment in the region. We can thus link European funds that focus on societies, on the economies of the future, to the willingness of the private sector to invest in training the labour force.



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4. As regards vocational training, this 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.
5. In Romania we have the following paradox: there are companies that have no staff with those skills necessary for their activity and, at the same time, we have 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.
6. 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.
7. 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 EPALE and Europass.

### 2.4. Opinions on education

Given that both EIR together with the MEA, as well as EUROPE DIRECT Bucharest organised several events in the field of education, many of the citizens who attended them 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 focus 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 from 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 citizens, whether we are in a time 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 the other EU Member States, Romania has a peculiarity: the urban-rural discrepancy. European funds must help narrow these educational discrepancies; they are in no way generated by the capabilities of children, but by factors external to the human, academic and professional potential of individuals.



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3. The citizens of Romania are diverse, and we cannot address children from disadvantaged areas the same way we address those from families with an above average economic level. We cannot address those who face domestic violence every day the same way we address those who have harmonious families, we cannot address those who have hardly something to eat – about 100,000 children, according to the World Vision Foundation – the same way we address the children that have everything they need.
4. Education reform is possible if the entire society prioritises it and makes the necessary changes, based on preliminary studies, for Romania to align with both the European trends and the strategies necessary for solving the national problems.
5. It is important to analyse the lessons learned in the different stages of the pandemic, especially regarding online education (e.g. inappropriate training for online education, digital tools poorly adapted for online teaching and collaboration).
6. The pandemic increased the need for further training for teachers, who expressed their wish to have access to 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, from the point of view of 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 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 to coordinate 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 to enhance the health sector, to tackle climate changes and to fight disinformation.
10. We can see education as an investment in the future. An educated population is creative, innovative and has initiative, and these elements are linked to the economy of the future. In the economy of the future, vocational training takes place throughout the lifetime.
11. Meeting points between school and the private system are needed; an idea to that end is represented by those vocational training poles from the big cities. However, there is also a need for comprehensive support programmes, that should address both the 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). The educational profiles are different, depending on the students' background, urban or rural, and the type of



family they come from. They should not lead to a differentiation as regards the right of access to education.

12. The best interests of the child must be what matters most, although sometimes we only think about the best interests of the teacher, of the school.
13. It is important for citizens to increase the budget allocated to education, but also to increase the support of the competent authorities, which should contribute with facilities, equipment and learning resources tailored to the new trends.
14. Research and innovation are particularly important when it comes 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 in order to strengthen investment in research and innovation. It is an aspect related to the development of the internal market.
16. Technological development gaps between Europe and other international actors are considerable. Development and strengthening of cooperation between Member States and academic research environments needs to be better coordinated.



**A comment from the citizens:** student councils should organise information sessions about studies in the European Union.

### 2.5. Opinions on health policies

Aspects related to **health** were raised during several debates, and citizens considered 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 broadening the competences of the EU institutions in the field of health. The conclusions of this category can be included in the *Health* topic from the multilingual platform of the Conference on the Future of Europe. Citizens expressed the following opinions concerning the health sector and policies:

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 has no competence in the field of health.
2. The health crisis has been a surprise for many societies, and existing or deepened gaps hamper the act of governance and affect the society, making it difficult to adapt. During crisis situations, the quality and the responsibility of politicians is tested, as prevention and preparedness for action are required, not just a response to crisis.
3. Within the health sector, the pandemic showed the importance of prevention, digitalisation, and the advantages of regional integration. It is necessary to apply the principles of decentralisation, debureaucratisation, and dynamization, to



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increase the quality of health services, attract funding for prevention, and increase the attractiveness, independence, and professionalization of the health professions.

4. Research and innovation in the health sector must be based on a sustainable strategy that includes all the subsectors, ensures long- and medium-term continuity and connection to Europe.
5. Although the Covid-19 pandemic was initially considered a “big equaliser” affecting all the states, it manifested itself as 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 has only coordination competences. The pandemic has worked as a trigger for reflection processes related to the way in which we are advancing and further enhancing our national policies at European level.
7. More synergic actions are necessary for a better and clearer communication regarding the advantages enjoyed by Romania, as an EU member state, in the health sector, pharmaceutical policies, crises management, safety standards for food, investments in the health sector, etc. Romania should make its voice heard in the European debates, to reduce the gaps between the national and the European health sectors.
8. It is the right time to discuss about extending the European Union’s competences in the fields of health, education, and digital transformation.
9. Managing the post-pandemic period may be equally difficult, if not more difficult than managing the pandemic crisis itself.
10. The European Parliament should invest more in the field of health, so that health crises could be solved faster and easier.

### 2.6. 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 construct 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.





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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 should 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 period, 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' participation/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 European Union is a Union of values, and there is a need to promote these values globally.



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

### 2.6.1. 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 discourse, 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. As regards Romania's situation, the negative scenario is that the exit from the pandemic might have major effects on Romania (e.g., from a social point of view:





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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.
4. It is necessary to address effectively the disinformation regarding the Covid-19 vaccines, which needs to be tackled from a coherent institutional approach. Moreover, the responsibility of institutions and actors who fight 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. However, we must be careful to populist political actors who may turn to citizens to promote Eurosceptic or even extremist attitudes.
6. All these crises lead to polarisation, crumbling, two-speed globalisation, the two-speed phenomenon that can be encountered within the same Member State and which is particularly dangerous.
7. We cannot have an effective EU communication if we do not have tangible results/progresses of tangible action.
8. European Union needs a stronger policy 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 great threats undermining the European economy.
9. We will face certain challenges for which we are not prepared, such as: diversity and extremism, which are introduced in Romania's Defence Strategy.
10. 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.
11. 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 "For how long we still delay the enlargement to the Western Balkans?" or "Where are the geographical boundaries of the EU?" will still need an answer.
12. Geopolitical competition should be a way of international development, not a monopoly of one geopolitical actor over others.

### 2.7. Opinions on resilience and the future of EU

A large part of the ideas and comments made during the events were related to understanding and building 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 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,



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respectively from addressing the vulnerabilities we have in the public administration. The summary of the conclusions drawn from the debates includes:

1. The lessons of this pandemic crisis must not leave us indifferent, once the crisis is overcome, we must see the lessons we have learned and build our responses on these lessons: a more resilient Union, more tailored to the challenges we face, and which meets the citizens' expectations; 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 giving the measure of 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, respectively the supply chains.
3. The resilience of European Union's neighbourhood 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 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 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, focusing on the changes and reforms that we need to ensure that certain events do not surprise us and have no negative effects on our society.
6. The European resilience and solidarity are based on the transformation of the European Union and its competences in the health sector, meaning, broadly speaking, and the establishment of directions of action regarding how the EU can respond to crises, taking into consideration 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 the European and national level, as currently there is a concern regarding the risk of overlapping and contamination the anti-vaccination narratives with the discourses about the advantages of EU membership.
8. Education is fundamental to the resilience of society. It generates civic attitudes, an essential component for 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.
9. The future of Europe also includes the future of education and research, and there are also programming documents at European level such as the European Green Deal or A Europe fit for the Digital Age, and they include elements related to education.
10. Young Europeans have the same concerns as young Romanians, when it comes to the future of Europe. These things are familiar to young Romanians, which show us



that they want us to have more coordination at European level in the field of education.

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

For the last category of this report, conclusions referring to Romania's contribution to the Conference on the Future of Europe were brought together. Thus, some of the citizens signalled 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 and comments can be included in the topics outlined above and are presented separately precisely to summarise the expectations and intentions of the Romanian citizens from the Conference on the Future of Europe. The aspects identified relate to:

1. Romania can contribute to this debate concerning expectations from the Conference by developing its own resilience, by ensuring its own prosperity and stability on the European Union's Eastern border, by participating in the decision-making process in an informed manner, by 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 to achieve them.
3. The debate should 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, respectively Romania's contribution to achieving European resilience through its own development and stability.
4. It is important to show that this debate covers everyday/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 that expectations might be very high, especially given the experience of previous citizen 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 the national leaders support the development of the European project? Is there a real debate between Brussels and the 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 EU's budget?
7. The pandemic highlighted stronger 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, EU has created a small core, but an entity with human resources and



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expertise (a kind of forward unit) is required, so that it becomes the place where long-term action directions are managed in an international rule-based order.

9. Debates should focus on essential aspects and should avoid those that have generated sensitivities over the years, such as institutional changes.



**A comment from the 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 on the aspects raised by citizens

Following the interaction with citizens in Romania, belonging to various socio-demographic categories, the European Institute of Romania summarised the opinions, comments and ideas expressed during the events. This report includes ideas and comments which represent the summary of the opinions expressed, which were organised into 10 categories, as follows: digitalisation and digital transformation, climate change and environment, transportation, economic recovery, social justice and jobs, education, health, European democracy and citizen participation, disinformation, polarisation and populism, 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 as regards the Conference are moderate, many people associating this consultation with a genuine exercise of citizen participation. Children and young people tend to be optimistic and very optimistic about the future of the European Union, some of them saying that they want to contribute to the promotion of European values at national level and to the modernisation of the country. In the debates, some also voiced concern regarding the impact of political instability on the implementation of the EU common agenda.

There are also very high expectations as regards the double transition, in particular as regards a just transition, with low costs for citizens and support for the most vulnerable ones. In view of the above, it is important that the Conference debates continue in other forms, so that citizens feel that they are part of the European decision, and the process is transparent and accountable.

For the Scoreboard regarding the main interests expressed by Romanian citizens in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe, Table 1 was created. The Scoreboard reflects the structure used in the reports issued by the participants in the four debate groups from the Conference on the Future of Europe.



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

No.	Field	Main interests
1	Digitalisation and digital transformation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Human capital and digital skills</li> <li>• Digital public services</li> <li>• E-Government</li> <li>• Smart cities</li> <li>• Open data</li> <li>• Technology as an element of competitiveness</li> </ul>
2	Climate change and environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Liberalisation of the energy market</li> <li>• Decarbonisation policy</li> <li>• Vulnerable consumers</li> <li>• Air quality and reducing pollution</li> <li>• Green knowledge and green skills</li> <li>• Financing sources for green projects</li> <li>• Biodiversity</li> </ul>
3	Sustainable mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cross-border transportation</li> <li>• Railway and road transportation</li> <li>• Public transportation</li> <li>• Transparency in public procurement</li> <li>• Limitation of car traffic in the cities</li> </ul>
4	Economic recovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State of national economy</li> <li>• Absorption of European funds</li> <li>• Areas and prospects for reform</li> <li>• Convergence with European average</li> <li>• Economic growth</li> </ul>
5	Social justice and jobs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimum wage in relation to the European average</li> <li>• Training labour force</li> <li>• Lack of labour force</li> <li>• Jobs of the future</li> </ul>
6	Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Urban-rural discrepancy</li> <li>• Poverty and social exclusion</li> <li>• Rethinking the educational process</li> <li>• Training of teachers</li> <li>• Increasing the education budget</li> <li>• Technological development gaps</li> </ul>
7	Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• European Union's competences</li> <li>• Post-pandemic management</li> <li>• Health investments</li> <li>• Decentralisation, debureaucratisation and dynamization in the health sector</li> <li>• Research and innovation in health</li> </ul>
8	European democracy and citizens' participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Citizens' involvement</li> <li>• Trust in institutions</li> <li>• Diminishing corruption</li> <li>• Leadership crisis</li> <li>• Union of values</li> </ul>



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9	Disinformation, polarisation and populism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Maintaining polarisation</i></li><li>• <i>Level of disinformation</i></li><li>• <i>Populist political actors</i></li><li>• <i>Diversity and extremism</i></li></ul>
10	Resilience and the future of the EU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>The internal market</i></li><li>• <i>Cohesion in the European Union</i></li><li>• <i>Production capacity</i></li><li>• <i>The European Union's neighbourhood</i></li><li>• <i>Resilience of liberal democracies</i></li></ul>
11	Romania's contribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Developing our own resilience</i></li><li>• <i>Definition of interests</i></li><li>• <i>Joining the Eurozone and the Schengen area</i></li><li>• <i>Strategic foresight</i></li></ul>



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### 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-November 2021)

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>	<b>EIR, through EUROPE DIRECT Bucharest</b>	Istvan Jakab, acting head, the Representation of the European Commission in Romania, <b>Oana-Mihaela Mocanu</b> , director general, EIR, <b>Loredana Licuța</b> , coordinator, EUROPE DIRECT Bucharest Information Centre, EIR, <b>Oana Ștefăniță</b> , PhD, lecturer, The Faculty of Communication (and Public Relations), The National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (NUPSPA), <b>Miruna Covaci-Zăvoi</b> , communication responsible, the 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, EPAL National Support Service, EQF, Europass and Euroguidance, <b>Karina Caramihai</b> , executive secretary, the National Council of Students.
2	9.05.2021	Pupils, students, teachers, NGOs, citizens	<i>“Europe dressed in new clothes” – Europe Day with Europe Direct Bucharest</i>	<b>EIR, through EUROPE DIRECT Bucharest</b>	<b>European School Choir under the Cantus Mundi National Programme</b> , pupils and teachers from schools in Bucharest and Ilfov County - Elena Cuza National College in Bucharest, Secondary school No. 113 in Bucharest, the International Theoretical High School of Informatics Bucharest and Nuci Secondary school, Ilfov County





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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	<b>Iulia Matei</b> , secretary of state for European Affairs/MFA, <b>Oana-Mihaela Mocanu</b> , director general, EIR, <b>Lazăr Comănescu</b> , ambassador, secretary general, the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, <b>Alina Bărgăoanu</b> , PhD, professor, the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest, president of the administrative board, EIR, <b>Dan Luca</b> , vice-president for Strategic Innovation, EURACTIV Brussels, <b>Robert Lupițu</b> , editor-in-chief, Caleaeuropeană.ro (moderator)
4	22.06.2021	Senior citizens, NGOs	<i>“Technology with and for seniors” Workshop</i>	EIR, through EUROPE DIRECT Bucharest	<b>Alexandra Dobre</b> , director general, Centre for Seniors of Bucharest Municipality, <b>Oana-Mihaela Mocanu</b> , director general, IER, <b>Loredana Licuța</b> , coordonator EUROPE DIRECT București, EIR, <b>Irina Chirițoiu</b> , director, European Consumers Centre Romania, <b>Veronica Ștefan</b> , founder, Digital Citizens Romania, <b>Diana Ioniță</b> , 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	<b>Andreea Hanganu Necula</b> , co-founder, Institute for Digital Government, <b>Ioan Istrate</b> , co-founder, CyBourn, <b>Vlad Măcelaru</b> , CEO and founder, Clark Vision (Romania), <b>Isabela Neague</b> , partnerships & communication manager, Station Europe
6	9.07.2021	Public institutions, NGOs, business environment, citizens	<i>Dialogues@EIR: #digitalisation</i>	EIR	<b>Oana-Mihaela Mocanu</b> , director general, EIR, <b>Mirela Mărcuț</b> , PhD, lecturer, University of Oradea, founder, digitalpolicy.ro, <b>Veronica Ștefan</b> , founder, Digital Citizens Romania, <b>Radu Puchiu</b> , CEO, H.appy Cities, <b>Flavia Durach</b> , PhD, lecturer, the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (moderator)



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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>	<b>EIR, through EUROPE DIRECT Bucharest</b>	<b>Sorina Bunescu</b> , trainer, CeRe Association, <b>Partener pentru Tine Association</b> , <b>Loredana Licuța</b> , coordinator, EUROPE DIRECT Bucharest Information Centre, EIR, <b>Ionela Panait</b> , information and communication expert, Europe Direct Argeș, <b>Florian Păun</b> , student, "I.L. Caragiale" National University of Theatre and Film, Bucharest, the Department of Photography
8	15.09.2021	Pupils, students, teachers, NGOs, citizens	<i>An event dedicated to #SOTEU 2021</i>	<b>EIR, through EUROPE DIRECT Bucharest</b>	<b>Loredana Licuța</b> , coordinator, EUROPE DIRECT Bucharest, EIR, <b>Dan Drăghia</b> , expert, Training and Projects Unit, EIR, <b>Mihaela-Adriana Pădureanu</b> , expert, European Studies Unit, EIR, <b>Ionuț-Mircea Marcu</b> , expert, European Studies Unit, EIR.
9	28.09.2021	Public institutions, NGOs, business environment, citizens	<i>The post-pandemic economy</i>	<b>EIR and MFA</b>	<b>Mihaela Ștefan-Simion</b> , director general, Department for the European Union, MFA, <b>Siegfried Mureșan</b> , member of the European Parliament, Group of the European People's Party (EPP), <b>Alina Bârgăoanu</b> , PhD, Professor, the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, chairman/president of the administrative board, EIR, <b>Daniel Dăianu</b> , member of the Romanian Academy, chairman of the Fiscal Council, PhD, professor, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, <b>Gabriela Drăgan</b> , PhD, professor, The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, <b>Ciprian Stănescu</b> , president, Social Innovation Solutions, <b>Laura Marinaș</b> , PhD, associate professor, The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, <b>Florian Neagu</b> , deputy director, Financial Stability Department, National Bank of Romania, <b>Eliza Vaș</b> , expert, European Studies Unit, EIR (moderator)



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10	5.10.2021	Pupils, teachers, NGOs, citizens	<i>Meet and Greet EUROPE DIRECT Bucharest!</i>  <i>(included a section on the future of Europe)</i>	<b>EIR, through EUROPE DIRECT Bucharest</b>	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
11	25.10.2021	Pupils, students, NGOs, citizens	<i>The living library “Let’s go green!”</i>	<b>EIR, through EUROPE DIRECT Bucharest</b>	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>	<b>EIR and MFA</b>	Iulia Matei, secretary of state for European Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ligia Deca, presidential adviser, Department of Education and Research, Presidential Administration, Oana-Mihaela Mocanu, director general, EIR, 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 Duminiță, 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)



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13	27.10.2021	Pupils, students, NGOs, citizens	<i>“What’s New in EU?” interactive dialogue</i>	<b>EIR, through EUROPE DIRECT Bucharest</b>	<b>Istvan Jakab</b> , economic adviser, European Semester, the Representation of the European Commission in Romania, <b>Gabriela Drăgan</b> , PhD, professor, The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, <b>Veronica Ștefan</b> , founder, Digital Citizens Romania, <b>Dan Croitoru</b> , organiser, TEDx (moderator)
14	22.11.2021	Public institutions, NGOs, business environment, citizens	<i>Towards a European Union of Health. Individual challenges, collective solution</i>	<b>EIR and MFA</b>	<b>Iulia Matei</b> , secretary of state for European Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <b>Andrei Baci</b> , secretary of state, Ministry of Health, <b>Oana-Mihaela Mocanu</b> , director general, EIR, <b>Alina Bârgăoanu</b> , PhD, Professor, the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, chairman/president of the administrative board, EIR, <b>Vlad Mixich</b> , international expert on health policies, board member of the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, <b>Dr. Valeria Herdea</b> , president of the Romanian Association for Paediatric education in family medicine, vice president of the Romanian College of Physicians, <b>Dr. Ion-Gheorghe Petrovai</b> , innovation director and cofounder FreshBlood HealthTech - EITHealth RIS Hub for Romania, <b>Diana Brâncuș</b> , senior journalist senior, TVR News (moderator).