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## REPORT ON CITIZENS' CONSULTATIONS ON EUROPE FINLAND

This report gives an overview of citizens' consultations on Europe in Finland, including the calendar and methodology of the consultations, views and concerns expressed by the citizens, outcomes of the consultations as well as some complementary observations on the consultations.

Additional information on activities organized or supported by the Finnish Government is provided as an Annex to this report.

### **Calendar and methodology of the consultations**

Finland has a long tradition of public debate and participation. The ongoing and lively civil dialogue on EU affairs is being conducted and encouraged by the Government, the Parliament, political parties, the European Commission Representation in Finland, the European Parliament's Office in Finland, local authorities, the business community, academia, labour market associations and other stakeholders as well as various non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

The Government in office is committed to continuing, widening and deepening the public debate on EU affairs. In January 2018, the Cabinet Committee on EU Affairs outlined that ministers would take actively part in citizens' consultations.

The Government EU Affairs Department at the Prime Minister's Office is responsible for coordinating EU matters and ensuring the proper functioning of the national EU coordination system. The Prime Minister's Office coordinates also communication on EU affairs. Each ministry is responsible for communication and public consultations in their own sector.

The national EU coordination system ensures participation of stakeholders in preparing Finnish EU positions and initiatives already at the civil servant level. Moreover, the Parliament fully participates in the national preparation of EU matters. This has contributed to an active exchange of views on EU affairs and has increased the acceptability and ownership of national decisions on EU affairs.

A key actor in promoting public debate on EU affairs is the MFA's Europe Information. In addition to its own events and activities, Europe Information grants annually government funding for NGOs (370 000 euros in total in 2018). For 2018, the future of EU was one of the main themes in the call for proposals. Europe Information is also active in the social media (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook).

Altogether numerous EU discussion events and activities have been organized in 2018. They were conducted in accordance with the principles of transparency, political pluralism, fairness and openness.

Many of the events and activities outlined below were coordinated in an informal "EU communication network" which brings together EU communication experts from the Prime Minister's Office, the MFA's Europe Information, the Finnish Parliament, the European Commission Representation and the European Parliament's Office in Finland as well as the Finnish Institute of International Affairs.

### *Prime Minister's debate series*

In February 2018, Prime Minister Sipilä launched a series of debates to listen to citizens' views on Finland's and EU's future. So far he has visited four cities: Oulu (sustainable and inclusive growth,

research and innovation, digital literacy), Turku (future of work and technology, Europe's stability and security) Vaasa (future of work, platform economy, sustainable growth) and Kuopio (environmental change and sustainability of natural resources, life-long learning, demographic ageing and health).

In addition to the workshops organized at local universities (with the Prime Minister interviewing the workshop leaders at the end of the event), the tour has included EU discussion events with local authorities, entrepreneurs and civil society, such as "Prime Minister's open EU hearings". Themes raised include democracy, equality, peace and security, sustainable development and growth, protection of the environment, the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), Brexit, Finland's role in the EU as well as the key role of NGOs in promoting public debate on EU issues.

On 31 August 2018, the Prime Minister participated in the Europe Forum Turku.<sup>1</sup> His speech and the following discussion focused on the future of EU and the forthcoming Finnish EU Presidency (fall 2019). Themes raised included common values, climate policy, migration, defence cooperation, the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), free trade, single market and research and innovation policy. The event was live streamed on Yle Areena (online service of Finland's national broadcasting company).

### *Participation of ministers*

Ministers have actively participated in discussion events within their own sectors. Examples include Question Time of the Minister for European Affairs at the Europe Forum Turku; Citizens' Dialogue on EU Trade Policy with Commissioner Malmström and the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development; Civil Dialogues on Energy and Climate Policy and EU Plastics Strategy with the Minister of the Environment, Energy and Housing; Seminar on the Future of Common Agricultural Policy with the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry; Citizens' Dialogue on the New Deal for Consumers with the Minister of Justice and Minister of Employment; Discussion Event on Worker Mobility and the Future of Work with the Minister of Employment; Citizens' Dialogue on the European Education Area 2025 with the European Commission Vice-President Katainen and the Minister for Education; Seminar on Topical Fundamental Rights Issues in the EU with the Director of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency Michael O'Flaherty and the Minister of Justice; as well as participation of the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development, the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Family Affairs and Social Services in the debates at the Europe Forum Turku.

### *Events and activities organized or supported by the MFA's Europe Information*

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs (Europe Information) started a discussion series on "Finland and the future of EU" in autumn 2017. The tour continued in 2018 across the country, including discussion events in Kuopio (EU and globalization), Hämeenlinna (Multiannual Financial Framework), Marienhamn (security policy, sustainable development), Helsinki (worker mobility and the future of work) and Turku (EU's role in the world).

The NGO activities supported by the MFA's Europe Information in 2018 have included a series of discussions on the Future of EU organized by the European Movement Finland (Eurooppalainen Suomi) and the Young European Federalists (JEF) Finland (Eurooppanuoret). The discussions have taken place across Finland, including the Helsinki region, Turku, Tampere, Hämeenlinna, Pori, Oulu, Rovaniemi, Vaasa, Seinäjoki and Jyväskylä. The tour has included one bigger discussion event in each city as well as smaller discussion events and visits to local vocational schools, high schools and universities.

### *Citizens' engagement via online platforms*

At national level, various tools, including online platforms, have been developed to strengthen the means for citizens' participation and consultation. So far, these platforms have only rarely been used for consultations related to EU affairs. A recent exception was the online survey on ending the seasonal time changes. The survey was conducted on Otakantaa.fi service from 26 September to

12 October 2018. The service is part of the electronic democracy services maintained by the Ministry of Justice.

Finland has lobbied ending the seasonal time changes after more than 70 000 Finns signed a petition to this end. A Commission's proposal is currently under consideration within the Council. The aim of the online survey was to collect views and opinions on whether Finland should adopt wintertime or summertime on a permanent basis. The survey turned out to be extremely popular. In total, it attracted 677 000 responses and 359 000 open answers. However, a considerable number of automated responses was subsequently eliminated from the results. Of the respondents, 52 % favoured wintertime and 48 % summer time.

To complement the results of the online survey a Gallup poll was also carried out. It produced highly similar results: Nearly 87 % was in favour of ending the seasonal time changes and permanent wintertime was slightly more popular than permanent summertime.

The results of the online survey and the Gallup poll will be taken into consideration when preparing Finland's position on the Commission's proposal.

#### *Contribution of the Advisory Board on Civil Society Policy*

The Advisory Board on Civil Society Policy (KANE) functions under the Ministry of Justice. Its main purpose is to strengthen cooperation between the authorities and the civil society. The Government appoints the advisory board for a four-year term. The members consist of representatives of the civil society, academia, ministries and local authorities.

KANE exchanged views on the citizens' consultations in September-October 2018 and provided a written contribution at the end of October. It emphasized the need to strengthen the dialogue with NGOs at EU level, defend a free civil society, promote implementation and monitoring of fundamental rights in the EU, continue the debate on the development of the EU together with the civil society, promote the principles of open government and interaction with the civil society both at national and EU level, improve awareness and knowledge on the state and future of the civil society in Europe through means of research and pay attention to ensuring long-term and predictable funding for the civil society, including through EU financing instruments.

#### *Activities of the Finnish Parliament*

The Parliament's EU committee ("Grand Committee") organized two public hearings on the future of EU and the forthcoming Finnish EU Presidency. The hearing in Tampere in June 2018 focused on the role of cities in strengthening the EU's social dimension, globalization and development of the EMU. The hearing at the Europe Forum Turku in August 2018 concentrated on EU's trade and development policies. In addition, the Grand Committee organized in October 2018 an NGO hearing focusing on the forthcoming Finnish EU Presidency.

#### *Events organized by the Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA)<sup>2</sup>*

The French Minister for European Affairs, Nathalie Loiseau participated as a keynote speaker in a FIIA seminar on "Refounding the European Union: Next Steps Ahead" on 15 June 2018.

After the June 2018 European Council, FIIA organised a discussion event focusing on the results of the meeting. Thematics discussed included development of the EMU and migration.

#### *Discussion events organized by local authorities*

Local authorities, universities and businesses have also taken the initiative. The best example is the so-called Europe Forum Turku, which was organized from 30 August to 1 September 2018 by local authorities, universities and other key actors in Turku.<sup>3</sup>

Europe Forum Turku brought together people from different backgrounds: government ministers, MPs and MEPs from both governing parties and opposition, Finnish officials from government and the EU institutions, local authorities, the business community, academia, labour market

organizations, NGOs<sup>4</sup> as well as ordinary citizens. Seminars, panel discussions, question times and civil dialogues provided a base for constructive dialogue on current and future EU affairs.

All activities took place in the Turku city centre. The venues included a theater, a hotel, a library and a brewery restaurant school. Part of the discussions as well as a Citizens' Market were organized in a shopping centre. The aim was to make the event as easily accessible as possible. People were encouraged to participate in the debates. Those not present could follow the debates online and participate in discussions via social media or a free mobile application.

Participants included the Prime Minister, Minister for European Affairs, Minister for Foreign Trade and Development, Minister of Finance, Minister of Family Affairs and Social Services, Vice President of the European Commission, Vice-President of the European Investment Bank (EIB), Governor of the Bank of Finland, Finland's Permanent Representative to the EU, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, CEO of Finland Chamber of Commerce and Chairs of the Finnish Labour Market Organisations. Key actors from all parliamentary parties joined the debates, as well as almost all Finnish MEPs.

Altogether almost a hundred key actors and experts participated in the debates. Around 2000 other participants followed and joined the discussions. In addition, the programme at the Citizens' Market attracted thousands of citizens.

Themes discussed included the EU's common values, the Single Market and EU's trade policy, artificial intelligence and the future of work, development of the EMU, Commission's Country Specific Recommendations for Finland, migration and asylum policy, food security in Europe, development of European City Policy, European Educational Area, Finland's EU Presidency, the EU's global role (including security and defence policy and EU-Africa partnership), Brexit, the future of EU finances, expectations of young people for Europe, opportunities for NGOs within the EU, the state of civil society in Europe and citizens' role in EU decision-making.

### **Views and concerns expressed by the citizens**

The views and concerns expressed by the citizens reflected to a large extent the results of the latest Eurobarometer surveys by the European Commission and the European Parliament.

According to the European Commission's Spring 2018 Eurobarometer, the respondents in Finland saw as the most important issues facing the EU now immigration (40 %), terrorism (32 %), climate change (25 %) and the state of Member States' public finances (22 %).

Regarding the future of the EU, respondents in Finland thought the EU's main assets are the EU's respect for democracy, human rights and the rule of law (41 %), the good relationship between the EU's Member States (32 %) and the economic, industrial and trading power of the EU (31 %). Terrorism and security issues (40 %), unemployment (38 %), the ageing of the EU's population (33 %); social inequalities (31 %) and the public debt of EU Member States (30 %) were seen among the EU's main challenges.

At least seven out of ten respondents in Finland thought that there should be more European level decision-making about fighting terrorism (84 %), promoting democracy and peace (76 %) and protecting the environment (72 %). Health and social security were seen as the most important issue facing Finland at the national level. However, 63 % of the Finnish respondents thought that there should be less European level decision-making in this area.

Of the Finnish respondents, 83 % had a positive or neutral image of the EU. Moreover, 79 % said that they feel themselves as "a citizen of the EU". The Finnish respondents favored especially the free movement of EU citizens (86 %), the EMU with one single currency (76 %), the EU's common trade policy (68 %) and the Common Defence and Security Policy (65 %). The free movement of people, goods and services (65 %), peace among the Member States (63 %) and the euro (45 %) were seen as the most positive results of the EU.

In the European Parliament's Eurobarometer Survey of September 2018, 65 % of the Finnish respondents thought that Finland's EU membership is a good thing. This is the highest figure since

2007. Moreover, 64 % of the respondents thought that their voice counts in the EU. Combatting climate change and protecting the environment (62 %), promoting human rights and democracy (49 %), security and defence policy (48 %), fight against terrorism (48 %), immigration (45 %) and combating youth unemployment (45 %) were seen as issues that should be discussed as a matter of priority in the run-up to the European Parliament elections.

According to the survey commissioned by JEF Finland in spring 2018, the attitude of the Finnish youth towards the EU is even more positive. As many as 81 % of the respondents (1009 people aged 18–29) thought that the EU membership was beneficial for Finland. Nearly 90 % said that they identified also as an EU citizen and agreed with the statements "the EU promotes peace" and "the EU promotes welfare and equality". The respondents thought that EU cooperation should be enhanced especially in combating climate change (76 %).

### **Outcomes of the citizens' consultations**

Taken into account the large diversity of the events and activities, their themes and the level and intensity of participation, it is difficult to draw any far-fetching conclusions of the exercise as a whole. Many of the events brought together people from different backgrounds, so it is natural that a variety of views were expressed. The outcomes listed below thus mainly focus on views and ideas raised with regard to citizens' participation and consultation.

- A common understanding existed on the need to better engage citizens and the civil society in the debate on Europe and its future. During the consultations, many participants emphasized that more needs to be done in this regard at both national and EU level.
- It was noted that while the Commission has invested in new tools to engage with citizens and stakeholders and inform them about its work, these tools, including the "contribute to law-making website", are not widely known in Finland. Creating a link between the Commission's website and the national online platform where citizens and interest groups can be invited to discuss ongoing projects (otakantaa.fi) was seen a way to improve the situation.
- Many of the participants welcomed the increased attention to the role of citizens and the civil society. At the same time, many expressed concerns about the state of the civil society and the rule of law in Europe. In this context, the need to ensure the implementation and monitoring of fundamental rights in Europe was underlined. As a concrete idea, it was suggested that the European Commission could conduct a Special Eurobarometer focusing on the state of civil society in the Member States. The need to improve awareness and knowledge on issues related to the civil society was emphasized. The need for the EU to promote the development and functioning of the civil society in Europe, including through long-term and predictable funding support, was stressed.
- The general attitude towards the EU membership and cooperation was to a large extent positive. However, many of the participants stressed the need for the EU to do more in addressing challenges such as migration, climate change, terrorism and hybrid threats. Some were concerned of the slow progress in completing the Single Market, others of the growing financial contributions after brexit.
- Frequent theme in the Finnish citizen discussions was also the respect for common rules, for example in matters related to migration, the EMU or the EU common values. Many saw this as a crucial issue for safeguarding the EU unity.
- In addition, the need to better communicate on EU affairs, and in particular matters related to citizens' consultation and participation, was raised.
- In general, "the future of EU" was perceived as quite a challenging and wide topic from the viewpoint of ordinary citizens. Some participants stressed that the focus should be more on encouraging action and debate on EU issues at the grassroots level. Local discussion events focusing on concrete subjects that affect citizens' everyday life were seen as important. Many stressed that local NGOs have an important role in promoting EU debate at the grassroots level.

