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Den Haag

The Hague Conversations on the Future of Europe in the World

The Hague in Europe, Europe in the World

A summary of the conclusions of a dialogue
process held in the City of The Hague from
September 2021 to February 2022

25 February 2022

With the support of



Conference
on the Future
of Europe



Background Note

The Hague Conversations on the future of Europe in the World was a series of ten activities organised by LINKS Europe foundation, in association with the City of The Hague and with the support of the Hague Humanity Hub. The events were mostly held in person, with some also held online or in hybrid format, from September 2021 to February 2022 as part of the “Conference on the future of Europe” process.

Hundreds of citizens of The Hague, and from the city's rich ecosystem of international organisations, diplomatic and political communities, think-tanks, education institutions, NGOs and community groups, attended and contributed to the conversation. Others joined from other parts of the Netherlands and the EU, and even from beyond, to contribute with their ideas. Opinions were also submitted in written form.

The big question discussed throughout the process was: What should be the future role of Europe in the world, and what should be the role of the City of The Hague in this?

Overwhelmingly, participants in The Hague Conversations on the future of Europe in the World believed in the importance of the European Union for future peace, justice and prosperity in Europe and its neighbourhood and in the wider world. They believe the European Union has been and should remain a force for good in the world. They also felt that The Hague can and should play a more active role in designing and delivering the new Global Europe agenda.

Participants had some key messages for the European Union:

- A constant theme in all the discussions was the importance that the EU should listen more, and communicate better.
- If citizens are expected to support, and pay, and in some circumstances even fight and die for a European role in the world, they need to be informed and as much as possible consulted; they expected their representatives in the European Parliament, and intermediaries between them and officialdom, be it think-tanks, civil society, academia or the media, to play a bigger role in oversight of EU foreign and security policy.
- There was widespread recognition that the world is passing through a dangerous moment, and that Europe and its citizens were facing new dangers, and that hardly won principles and values that have become a bedrock of EU society were now under threat. The EU should remain a normative power, but it must lead by example: a Europe that is divided on its values cannot efficiently disseminate these values to the rest of the world.
- Europe must sharpen its soft power tools, even as it slowly builds its hard power tools. The EU needs to see itself as a soft-power superpower. Hard power needs to be a last resort and delivered as part of a broader Team Europe effort, which should also include NATO.
- Global Europe cannot succeed unless the EU gets its relations with its neighbourhood right. This requires more clarity on enlargement; stronger engagement in the process of developing a new European security architecture, and a renewed effort to engage with the neighbourhood south.
- The EU should continue to pursue multilateralism and a rules-based international system as the basis of its foreign policy, supporting the UN and leading in the process of its reform.
- EU foreign policy starts at home. Contradictions within the EU on issues of democracy, human rights and the rule of law weaken the European message abroad. At municipal and national levels, authorities need to empower citizens to better understand the role of Europe in the world, and be involved in the design and delivery of Global Europe.

Participants felt that The Hague, as the City of Peace and Justice, should be at the forefront of these processes, including through empowering its diverse communities, its strong ecosystem of think tanks, academic institutions, and civil society groups to work in partnership with governments and EU institutions for a Global Europe that is a force for good in the world.

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I. Preamble

(a) Europe, our common home, and its place in the world

Europe is our common home. For 450 million citizens across 27 member states, the European Union is the vehicle that drives the quest for peace and prosperity on the continent; its institutions put into practice our common aspirations and regulate our economy, and increasingly, our way of life. Overall, and regardless of shortcomings and disappointments, the European project has worked, kept peace between the EU member states, improved individual and collective rights, extended prosperity, and generally made the continent a force for good in the world.

There is, however, neither room nor time for complacency. A range of existential challenges are now looming – from climate change to the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic; from the threat of war close to us to the erosion of hardly gained fundamental rights and freedoms across the world. It is clear that not only are past achievements not easily expanded and sustained, but there is now a threat that many of them can be reversed. Thus, the safety and security of EU citizens cannot be seen or addressed in narrow terms of hard power projection only. The EU, as the only potential soft-power superpower, needs to be able to identify how to use different tools in tandem with each other as it faces the challenges ahead.

For the European Union, simply engaging with the world as before is no longer an option. There are some very hard choices to be made, and as we go forward, we all – institutions, member states, citizens – have to navigate some very real and very difficult dilemmas.

At the heart of the current debate on the future of the European Union is the central question of democracy and accountability, and the role of the citizen. The Conference on the Future of Europe, an initiative led by the three main EU institutions – the Council, the Parliament and the Commission – is an exercise across the 27 member states that aims to bring the citizen back to the centre, in a process of discussion and reflection on different aspects of the future of Europe.

(b) The Conference on the Future of Europe

The Conference on the Future of Europe has been a very timely exercise that has allowed voices from across the continent to be heard. Despite the limitations on public gatherings brought about by the pandemic, thousands of Europeans from all walks of life have engaged in a process of reflection and dialogue over the last year.

LINKS Europe, an independent foundation based in The Hague, in association with the City of The Hague and with the support of The Hague Humanity Hub, in September 2021 embarked on a series of conversations on the theme “The Future of Europe in the World”. Despite the constraints of following the government rules and guidelines related to the COVID-19 pandemic, ten events in six clusters of activities were organised in the period September 2021 to February 2022. Most were held in person, whilst some were held online or in hybrid form. Hundreds of citizens of The Hague – including participants from the city’s rich ecosystem of international organisations, diplomatic and

political communities, think-tanks, education institutions, NGOs and community groups – attended and contributed to the conversation. Others joined us from other parts of the Netherlands and the EU, and even beyond, to contribute with their ideas. Opinions were also submitted in written form.

The summaries of proceedings from these events have fed into the wider process of the Conference on the Future of Europe. This paper aims to catch the mood and spirit of these conversations and highlight key messages and ideas. Throughout these conversations, participants emphasised the need not to turn this debate into an abstract exercise. They wanted to know how changes in the way the EU conducts its relations with the world will affect them, how they can contribute to the process, and how they can have their voices heard. This paper therefore connects the theme of The Hague in Europe with that of Europe in the World. For many of the participants at our events, the two were very much interlinked.

(c) Foreign policy begins at home

Throughout the series of Conversations on the Future of Europe in the World held in The Hague, participants repeatedly emphasised that what Europe does in the world depends a lot on its own internal vision and cohesion. It's useless to preach about European values to the rest of the world when within the EU these values are often under threat. Citizens have a right to be part of the debate about the role of the EU in the world. Without such a debate, foreign policy initiatives quickly run out of popular support and steam. There was also among participants an understanding that a sense of complacency existed for many citizens, which led to a big disconnect with how they view EU policy. Part of this problem is the result of lack of information, part the result of disinformation, but a large part is due to the failure of the intermediaries between citizens and political power: politicians, especially MPs and MEPs; journalists and commentators; think tanks and academics; and community leaders and opinion shapers, who, it was felt, could do more to ensure that citizens are better informed and empowered.

II. Europe in the World

(a) Can Global Europe be a force for good in today's challenging geopolitical environment?

Despite the fact that the European Union remains a project under construction, there are high expectations in terms of what it can deliver. To protect the interests of its member states – and the values, and prosperity and security of its citizens – the European Union must have a global reach and vision, and the necessary tools worthy of its size and importance. Today, the European Union has one of the most extensive diplomatic networks in the world; it has agreements and framework arrangements with scores of countries and regional and subregional organisations; it operates a score of military and civilian missions and operations on three continents. A geopolitical Europe is already a fact, it is only the nature of its geopolitics, and its future, that is under debate, and particularly the tools that it needs to play this role effectively

A force for good

The European Union should strive to be a force for good in the world. This does not mean building the world in its own image. It is by example of the way it conducts itself at home and abroad that the EU can best be an inspiration for others. The European Union is built on values, and on the rights that citizens have fought for and won over centuries, and which have been enshrined as the basis of post-WWII European society. Projecting these values to the rest of the world should be done sensitively, not least because of the baggage of history. Very often European countries have conveniently forgotten the baggage of their colonial past, and the way that this colours how others

perceive Europe and the European Union. This requires a certain humility in the conduct of foreign policy. Finger pointing and naming and shaming may be sometimes necessary, but it is also important to keep in mind that it can be easily misunderstood and may turn out to be counterproductive. Whilst Europe may think it has the moral high ground, others may think differently based on their collective historical memories. Frank, intensive dialogue and multi-tiered engagement should therefore be the tools of choice.

A Listening Europe

The institutions of the European Union must learn to listen better. First, they must listen better to their own citizens. This process, whether directly or through elected representatives, and intermediaries such as think tanks, NGOs and community groups, has to be continuous and dynamic. A trend that sees citizens input as a chore to be ticked off rather than a central part of the process can be observed. It is dangerous and such approach needs to be eradicated.

The EU must also listen better when conducting its international relations. There is a certain awkwardness in the way some heads of EU delegations conduct themselves, especially in countries that are beneficiaries of EU financial support. One criticism of EU delegations is that they talk too much and do not listen enough. Even if this is not the case, the fact that it is a widespread perception is an important curiosity. The heads of EU delegations are not Viceroys, even in those countries that depend heavily on EU assistance, and their role needs to be well defined and understood. The EU must fine-tune a formula in its international relations whereby it pursues dialogue always, uses carrots whenever possible, and uses the stick only when absolutely necessary.

A Europe that communicates better

A constant theme that came up in practically all the meetings held in process of The Hague Conversations on the future of Europe in the World was the need for the EU to communicate better what it does, why it does it, and how it does it. “The EU never seems to win the narrative battle”, one participant said. Given the amount of time, energy, and resources that the EU spends on its communications strategy, this is odd. It is partly explained through the cumbersome decision-making process, the many sensitivities of member states that are strikingly reflected in every decision and step that the EU makes, and the fragmentation and sometimes outright competition between and within the institutions. What comes out after an exhausting process at consensus building, is often a fudge. It is then left to the strategic communicators to make the best of it, often working with complex, contradictory and confusing constraints. What comes out is sometimes so confusing that it makes sense only to those who have been part of the elaborate decision-making process. And the member states are not the only culprits. The text of resolutions coming out of the European Parliament, especially in the domain of foreign policy, are often some of the worst examples of this problem. Citizens have the right to express dissatisfaction with this state of affairs, and increasingly they are doing so.

Combatting disinformation at home and abroad

Freedom of expression and the free media is an indispensable part of the fabric that makes up the European Union and European society. The advent of the internet has empowered citizens and turned everyone with internet access into a potential journalist.

The free media is the first line of defence against elaborate disinformation campaigns launched from unfriendly quarters. However, the citizens themselves must become part of this defence barrier. The battle against disinformation needs to be sustained and improved. The EU needs to lead with raising awareness of the potential harm of disinformation and fake news, how to spot them, and how to combat them; and should develop a co-ordinated response.

Citizens must be able to understand why global engagement matters

Throughout the gatherings in the framework of The Hague Conversations on the Future of Europe in the World, the point was often made of the risk that citizens views are manipulated by disinformation or fall victim to forces apt at instrumentalising bigotry. Young people were considered to be particularly vulnerable to this threat. Thus, foreign policy actions, especially costly ones where billions of euros are being spent, need to be explained and justified. It was felt that initiatives that are able to bring in non-state stakeholders – through initiatives that involve the private business sector, and that are positively assessed by independent think tanks, academia and civil society – are more likely to have public trust

(b) A European vision for a world based on peace and justice, co-operation and prosperity

The EU's vision of its role in the world, enshrined in many documents, statements, and declarations is of a Union that promotes a peaceful and just world based on multilateralism and a rules-based international system. The EU achieves these grand objectives to different degrees of success, with a few outright failures. The world is in a very different place from the days of the end of the Cold War when Europe could bask in its success as it contemplated embracing the Eastern half of the European continent.

A difficult neighbourhood? A scary world?

It is often said that Europe has a difficult neighbourhood. From the shores of the Atlantic coast of the Sahel to the Horn of Africa, the Middle East and the Caucasus, an arc of crises appears to embrace the EU's immediate neighbourhood. To the north, climate change is creating new conditions in the Arctic that, apart from their immense environmental consequences, also have strategic ones. To the east, Russia is increasingly unpredictable, assertive, and violent, and has by its actions in recent years, challenged the post-WWII European security order and the rules based international system. The threat that jihadist groups may exploit vulnerabilities in states in the Sahel and the Levant remains very real. The EU rightly attaches great importance to relations with the neighbourhood, and has in place a number of instruments – such as the European Neighbourhood Policy, the Eastern Partnership and others – whose main aim is to promote stability and prosperity in the neighbourhood. Relationships with the neighbourhood, however, need to also be seen as the crucial and indispensable first part of the EU's engagement with the world. All else will become secondary, and almost irrelevant if this first part fails. Connected to it are issues of internal security, illegal migration, energy security, defence, and other core and immediate challenges. The challenges are multi-tiered and multi-faceted, and so must be the response.

Ambiguity in the EU's own enlargement policy is itself becoming a source of instability in the neighbourhood

The European Union remains ambivalent about its membership. There are big differences in the opinions of member states, and these divisions are also reflected in how EU citizens look at the issue:

- Some see it as the right of every country on the European continent to apply for membership, strive for it, and to eventually achieve it.
- Others see membership as exclusive – in the gift of its current members to give or to refuse. Those in this category often speak of “enlargement fatigue”.
- Others see the process as more technical, with the European Commission running an exhaustive checklist of which the *Acquis Communautaire* is a part, declaring the suitability, or otherwise, of applicants.

For some time now, enlargement has been off the immediate agenda, with no clarity as to which of the above criteria the EU is currently committed to. In the Balkans a number of countries have the status of candidate countries and have been promised membership as soon as they have fulfilled the necessary criteria. The EU appears, however, to move the goalposts every time they seem to be nearly ready. This uncertainty is creating a very real stress on the politics of the Balkans, in contradiction to what the EU initially started off trying to achieve.

In the post-Soviet space, the trio countries – Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine – have extensive and comprehensive Association Agreements with the EU. They are now asking for membership perspectives, even if in the long term, but this request has by and large been snubbed.

And then, of course, there is the elephant in the room – Turkey – who was accorded candidate status in 2004, but whose membership of the EU is, according to some EU leaders, not possible – now or ever. The unique role of Turkey, and its increasing importance as a key player in the European neighbourhood, requires a serious rethink in how the EU engages with it.

The EU needs to take the bull by the horns and decide on the issue of enlargement. Ambiguity and contradictory messages are themselves now becoming a source of instability, which on this occasion is of the EU's own making.

Proposal 1

The EU needs to revisit the issue of enlargement. There needs to be a consultation process across the Union, in which citizens are also involved, from which a clear policy and roadmap must emerge. This hugely important decision needs to be based on facts not perceptions, and the end decision needs to be clear, transparent, fair, and doable.

A fresh approach to Europe's neighbourhood South

The EU must remain very much engaged in its relations with its southern neighbourhood. There is a need for a more joined-up approach in the work of the EU institutions and the member states in this area. EU actors must show more political astuteness, and be more nuanced, and they need to be ready to engage with difficult and awkward counterparts. Recent developments in the Sahel are not very reassuring and indicate certain weaknesses in the approach.

This raises questions about the EU's capacity to assess situations and anticipate problems. There is a need within the EU of more expertise on the countries of this mega region and their societies, including on realities beyond the capitals. There should also be better use of soft power tools; more people-to-people contacts at different levels, but also frameworks that allow good practices in the southern neighbourhood to be shared around.

(c) Working for a rules-based international system in the neighbourhood and beyond

A new European security architecture

The ongoing crisis around Ukraine has brought the issue of European Security back to the top of the agenda. That things were not going well has been apparent for some time. The debate about the future of European security has been left to drift for nearly two decades as arms control treaties lapsed or were dismantled; painfully crafted and designed confidence-building measures went into disuse; and megaphone diplomacy replaced difficult but necessary diplomatic negotiations. The EU is partly to blame since it failed to lead. Post Ukraine crisis, it must show that it has learnt lessons.

Proposal 2

The debate on the future of the European Security Architecture is primarily a political one, despite the obvious military and security dimensions. The EU must have a voice where European security is being discussed; in some circumstances and on some issues, it must be able to lead. It can start by hugely increasing its role in the OSCE, despite the somewhat awkward way in which it engages with it due to procedural issues. A complete overhaul of the OSCE may be necessary to reflect the new harsh realities of the present.

Peace in the neighbourhood

For the European Union, peace in the neighbourhood is essential. Time and again we have seen how conflicts in remote corners of the neighbourhood can quickly spiral into fully fledged crisis. The current crisis over Ukraine is a case in point. Unresolved conflicts in the post-Soviet space have been one of the factors that poisoned relations with Russia. They have also kept Eastern Europe and the Caucasus unstable despite much progress in other fields. In the Sahel, the insurgency of radical Islamic groups feeds on past grievances and sets

the scene for further future conflict. The ongoing conflict in Yemen has not only created a humanitarian disaster on an epic scale, but risks creating instability across the whole of the Arabian Peninsula. The EU response to conflict has been patchy – flashes of high activity are often followed by long periods of inertia; drawn out bureaucratic responses, often bogged down in interagency squabbles in Brussels, continue to weaken the EU's hand in engaging with conflict prevention and resolution. The EU needs to sharpen its tools, and this needs to start first with the President of the Commission reviewing ongoing systems and procedures and making sure that the process is not only joined up on paper, but also in fact. Many participants in The Hague Conversations on the future of Europe in the World expressed concern that the shift towards the militarisation of security in the EU is taking place without proper debate on whether it is the right thing to do in the first place and moved too quickly to a discussion of “what and how” before there was a proper discussion of “why and when”.

Strengthening Multilateralism should start with UN Reform

Whilst the European Union has been a strong supporter of multilateralism as a way of conducting foreign policy, it may not have been doing enough to actually make sure that multilateralism works. The United Nations remains the central piece in the global international order established after WWII. It is today a very different organisation from that established in 1945 – its membership having increased from 51 to 193, mainly as the result of decolonisation and the emergence of dozens of new countries. The EU must work to strengthen the UN, and to strengthen its own role in it.

Proposal 3

The European Union should embark on a mission to lead the reform of the United Nations, including through a sustained diplomatic initiative that should seek to build common ground and in a timely way move with the reform process. This process should entail a reform of the Security Council, where the present-day realities need to be reflected, including through revisiting issues such as the number of permanent members and the veto power. This will be a task that is likely to take a number of years. To remain focused, the EU should appoint a Special Representative for UN Reform whose task will be to engage with the international community on the topic, and to keep the EU and its institutions focused on the objective.

Connectivity

The EU is first and foremost a trading bloc. Its strongest card in the international arena so far has been its ability to set standards and norms when it comes to trade and commerce. Its prosperity depends on connectivity, and primarily on smooth transport and communication links. Increasingly added to this is a third pillar – digital connectivity. The recently launched “Global Gateway” initiative promises to mobilise 300 billion euros to help boost smart, clean links in digital energy and transport, and strengthen health and education research across the world. This initiative is worthy in itself and needs not be seen or promoted simply as a counter to China's “Belt and Road Initiative”. It needs to be delivered in a timely manner. Neither should this be seen simply as a benign action. “Global Gateway” needs to be about promoting Europe's interests in an increasingly competitive world, that also recognises the importance of trade routes such as the Europe-Caucasus-Central Asia transport corridor, and choke points such as the Bosphorus, the Straits of Hormuz and the Suez Canal.

It is one reason why the EU needs to continue reaching out to the countries of Central Asia who have been somewhat isolated from global processes. To succeed in this part of the world, which has until recently been largely inaccessible and where the EU has little or no leverage, the EU needs an agile and flexible approach.

The EU has often treated the Arab states of the Gulf as distant partners. In fact, they are part of the EU neighbourhood ecosystem, yet EU-GCC co-operation has so far been unsatisfactory – although there are signs this may be changing. The very dynamic process of reforms going on in the societies and economies of these countries offers an opportunity for the EU to engage as a genuine partner.

(d) Hard, soft, smart, or weak – what power should the EU project?

The European Union is often described as an economic giant, but a political and military midget. Part of the reason is that the EU is still a work in progress. The current treaties and frameworks are in many ways designed to restrain the Union's power in the areas of international politics and defence, to the advantage of the member states. There is enough understanding that this situation is not sustainable to ensure that over the next decade the EU will at least move to the next step in the process of increasing its political and military power. The current debate on the Strategic Compass is important, and it needs to be brought to its logical conclusion as soon as possible. The debate on the competencies of the institutions and decision-making must start.

The false debate about hard versus soft power

Around the topic of power, a false debate has ensued about the benefits of soft or hard power. For many years the EU claimed to exert influence through soft power. Then, with very little analysis or reflection on whether soft power was being properly galvanised and projected, it came to the conclusion that soft power was not working and that it needed hard power. But what kind of hard power? Should the EU have its own army? Up to what extent should strategic autonomy be envisaged? Can you, in this day and age of nuclear proliferation, have real strategic autonomy unless you are nuclear armed? In short, where does this quest for strategic autonomy stop?

Soft power

Soft power works, and the European Union will make a big mistake if it stops using it. In fact, the ambition should be to turn the EU into the world's only soft power superpower. The EU needs to reflect on how it has conducted soft power since the end of the cold war, and how best to enhance its soft power strength going forward, building on the rich diversity of its people, the experience of its institutions, the enormous talent and knowledge within its universities and think tanks, the vibrancy of its media and communication sector, the dynamism of its civil society, and the presence of a myriad of diaspora groups within it that can be bridge builders to distant lands and societies. Altogether, this makes the EU uniquely placed to be the world's only soft power superpower. It is an opportunity not to be missed.

Proposal 4

The EU needs to revisit soft power before dismissing it as its primary foreign policy tool. In every case soft power needs to remain a central pillar in the strategy for Global Europe. If it has not worked properly in the past, questions need to be asked as to why? Was it a lack of resources; inept delivery; disconnect between various EU programmes or initiatives? Or perhaps failures in the way partners and communities on the ground were engaged.

The EU needs to have a proper inventory of its soft power tools; it needs to know how much it is actually spending on soft power and what additional resources are needed. It needs to address the obvious gaps in soft-power tools, including better use of culture, exchange programmes, education, and youth exchanges. The EU should resist the temptation to turn peacebuilding into a bureaucratic process. Its mediation and peacebuilding toolbox must be fast and flexible if it is to respond in time to evolving crises. On the other hand, long term engagement with conflict or potential conflict situations, needs to be consistent and constant. In most situations, there are no quick fixes, and the EU must muster the stamina to remain engaged even when the camera lights are off and the interest of the media has moved to another story.

It needs to consider having a dedicated Commissioner responsible for soft power development and projection.

Above all it needs to be comfortable and proud in the role of soft power superpower.

Hard Power

The present reality in international relations does not allow the European Union to be solely reliant on soft power. Russia's behaviour in its neighbourhood, including its occupation and annexation of Crimea and its behaviour in Georgia and in Ukraine, has focused minds. Beyond the continent, jihadist groups struggle to capture power in vulnerable states in the EU's immediate neighbourhood; and beyond, China's assertiveness in the military, political and economic spheres requires a response. On the high seas, piracy has resurrected. These threats cannot in the short term be mitigated by soft power. However, equally, giving the EU hard power capacity is a long-term ambition, in considering its hard power options the EU must act pragmatically and realistically. It must build on what is already there; it must not try to duplicate or replace the military power of its member states and their existing alliances, and instead it needs to find niches through which it can add value. In short, it needs smart hard power.

Proposal 5

The EU should abandon the idea of a European Army. Instead, it should provide a framework where it can assist if two or more member states may decide to work together to unify all or several defence capacities, and there should be an EU-wide inventory of defence capacity. The EU may, however, develop its own niche defence capacities, particularly in areas of cyber defence; space; response to biological warfare; defence research and production; and other sectors which will benefit from a collaborative pan-European approach. This will give the EU a specific but not insignificant defence capability in areas where it could excel. This will justify the EU's place on the table of large powers. The other reality is that most member states are also members of NATO and see it as the cornerstone of their defence. The EU should not try to compete, on the contrary, the work being done to increase EU-NATO co-operation needs to be sustained and developed. The EU must in the process of doing so understand the specific situation of those of its member states who are neutral, or for other reasons have opted not to join NATO. More political work needs to be done to ensure that these member states, and their citizens, are comfortable with this process. The EU needs smart power, a mix of hard and soft power, maximising the capacity of the Union and its institutions, as well as those of that of the member states and their alliances.

(e) Working better, delivering more

Keeping ahead

On many issues, and in many fields, the European Union is one or more steps ahead of others in the world. Research and innovation must continue to be embraced, resourced and, as much as possible, prioritised. On digitalisation, Europe needs to be ambitious. These ambitions should not exclude, but rather encourage, working with partners.

There are areas where the EU excels. As an economic power it has developed a gold standard for global trade that everyone now respects. These standards include the need to recognise and respect the rights of workers and consumers, protect intellectual property, and create a level playing field.

There are other areas where the EU can develop a similar lead, including when it comes to defence and security and soft power tools. Identifying these niches, properly resourcing them and excelling in them needs to be a priority. One area, cyber defence, is a crucial part of the EU's resilience going forward. It must not only be integrated in the wider foreign, defence and security policy, it simply must become the best at it.

Decision making on foreign and security policy that is efficient, cost effective, transparent, and accountable

Ahead is a long debate on decision making in the EU. We are far from being at a point where this debate can be brought to a successful

conclusion. In the meantime, however, the problem must not be thrown under the carpet, where populists and adversaries can use it and abuse it. It must become part of a mature structured debate across society. However, risks and challenges in the field of foreign and security policy will not wait, so interim measures are needed.

Proposal 6

The EU should update PESCO – the EU's Permanent Structure Co-operation mechanism on defence. Don't hide it from the public eye; help citizens value it.

It should open the debate about the establishment of a European Security Council and its potential composition and powers. This can be an efficient forum where the EU and other like-minded countries that share similar values, such as Norway and UK, can co-ordinate defence strategies and crisis response.

Oversight of the EU's global ambitions and outreach

As the topic of Global Europe becomes more important, oversight must also increase accordingly. Citizens must have timely and accurate information, and a process of feeding opinion into the decision-making process needs to evolve. Those who say that you cannot have a referendum every time a decision on foreign policy is needed are, of course, right. But this does not mean that citizens' views should not be sought and taken into account whenever necessary and possible. Intermediary groups (think tanks, academia, NGOs, business groups etc) working on the theme of Global Europe need to be empowered.

Proposal 7

The European Parliament is the first and most important intermediary between EU decision makers and the citizens of Europe. It must sharpen its oversight work of EU's external engagement. Whilst there have been increased visits by the High Representative to the Parliament, and the Parliament pronounces itself often on foreign policy issues, there is no doubt that the oversight work can be done much better, and is often best done at Committee level where a much more detailed and exhaustive process can take place. Endless resolutions, that are written in a form that is hardly understandable even to their authors, do not contribute to transparency and accountability. Citizens want thoughtful analysis, deep-rooted assessments, and a process of holding the Executive to account – not endless and senseless pronouncements. The Parliament should therefore review, first how it conducts its own foreign policy outreach; and second, how it can conduct oversight better, including by learning from the experience of the member states, as well as the US and the UK, and others on this matter.

Team Europe needs to embrace the input of think tanks, academia, civil society and business organisations

In recent years, the European Union has sought to close the gap between its actions and those of its member states in the delivery of foreign policy, and in the tools deployed. 'Team Europe' is a brand which helps convey this message to the world.

The EU needs to take this work to its logical next step, which is to consider how non-state actors –including civil society organisations, think tanks, and academia and business – can also be similarly galvanised. On the other hand, the EU must be constantly vigilant of the work of those lobbying for specific commercial or state interests. The line between lobbying and advocacy is very thin, but it must never be crossed.

The EU already works extensively with civil society in the delivery of its projects in the world. It engages closely with think tanks and academia

on research, innovation, and analysis; and it increasingly seeks partnerships with the private business sector in its endeavours abroad. This co-operation has grown organically over many decades. It very often looks archaic, over bureaucratized, and inefficient.

Proposal 8

- (a)** The EU needs to renew its commitment to a strong civil society, and to working effectively with civil society in delivering the ambition of Global Europe.
- (b)** There should be a root and branch review of how the EU engages with civil society and other non-state actors in the process of delivering Global Europe. This should be a credible, comprehensive, and open process, conducted with a critical eye, and the conclusions should be published.
- (c)** The EU should consider the appointment of an NGO Ombudsman whose task will be to keep a constant review of EU engagement with civil society, make recommendations, and listen and investigate complaints from civil society organisations about their interactions with EU institutions.
- (d)** At a time when civil society throughout the world is under pressure, the EU needs to find a way of interacting with loose structures and semi-formal grassroots organisations.
- (e)** The EU needs to recognise the value of diaspora groups and NGOs. Across the Union these groups need to be treated equally and with respect and not called upon simply “to put out fires”. Spaces can be created for interaction between diaspora groups and wider civil society, and these can be part of a structured network.

III. The Conference on the future of Europe was a timely and important exercise. Now what?

Overall, across Europe, those who engaged in the process of the Conference on the Future of Europe generally felt that it was a timely and useful exercise. Even though only a miniscule amount of the 450 million EU citizens were touched by the process, the fact that the initiative persevered despite the pandemic shows a level of commitment and interest that should not be underestimated or undervalued.

The question many are asking is “Now What?”

First there is the question of what happens to the many ideas, recommendations, and opinions expressed in this exercise. There should be a clear commitment to action as many of the ideas as possible and a deadline by which to report progress – say, one year.

Proposal 9

Turn ideas into tangible decisions; keep the conversation going!

The three EU institutions that launched the Conference on the Future of Europe now need to show how they are going to respond to what has come out of the process. The European Parliament should constitute an ad hoc committee that will be tasked to monitor the process and produce a progress report each year for the next three years.

In the meantime, the conversation must be kept going.

The second question is how do we keep the conversation going? Whilst endless conversations without tangible results are self-defeating and need to be avoided, a listening Europe needs to find a way to sustain and build on what the Conference on the future of Europe has been able to achieve.

IV. The Hague in Europe

The City of The Hague embodies different qualities that make it in many ways unique: It is the political and diplomatic capital of the Netherlands; it is a vibrant European city hosting 30 European organisations that between them employ more than 7,000 residents; and it is an international city, hosting many international institutions especially in the field of peace and justice. Increasingly, the City of The Hague is also home to national and international civil society groups working on similar issues. The various incubators for ideas, start-ups and centres for development and excellence, especially in areas of peace and justice, such as The Hague Humanity Hub, The Hague Security Delta, Impact City etc, are imaginative, forward-looking tools that help bridge the gap between decision makers and citizens in areas of defence, foreign policy, security, and the rule of law.

The City of The Hague is also home to people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds who all contribute to making it a diverse, colourful, and dynamic community. They now add to The Hague's traditional Dutch communities, giving the city a particular vibrance and attraction.

In the process of discussing the future of Europe in the world, many citizens asked about the role of their city in such an endeavour. Many felt that The Hague can and should play a more active role in European affairs, and particularly it can and should play a more active role in the shaping of Global Europe. As the City of Peace and Justice, The Hague is already central in the design and delivery of a new vision of Europe in the world, with peace and prosperity as its core mission, and respect for a rules-based international system at its heart.

To achieve this the city needs to have a better voice in Europe and should consider how it can make itself seen and heard better in Brussels. Many said they wanted to see the city play a central role in amplifying their voice within the European Union – through its representation in Brussels and other means. The City of The Hague can also help build synergies between different activities and initiatives within its foreign policy ecosystem by providing a forum to enable interaction and cross fertilisation of ideas.

Proposal 10

The Hague is uniquely placed to show how Global Europe can be transformed into an aspiration shared by diverse stakeholders and grassroots communities. The Conference on the Future of Europe should take notice of the very dynamic and evolving experience of The City of The Hague in connecting decision makers with citizens on difficult topics such as foreign policy, defence, and security and rule of law, and see what lessons can be learned from it and how it can inspire other communities and cities across the EU.

As the City of The Hague expands its role in Europe and in the world, it must make sure that its citizens are part of this journey. “European and Global The Hague” needs to communicate its work with its grassroots. There needs to be a better showcasing of the work being done by people and organisations in the city across the world, the impact this work has at home and abroad, and why and how this is valuable for the whole community. The Hague has a rich diversity of diaspora communities who are actively involved in all aspects of city life – and they include people from very a broad range of backgrounds, from high flying business executives to recently arrived refugees. These communities can contribute to building bridges to other countries and regions, as well as different cultures and civilisations.

V. Conclusion

We are grateful to the dozens of experts and opinion shapers to heled inform the discussions throughout the programme “The Hague Conversations on the Future of Europe in the World”. We are particularly grateful to the hundreds of people who joined our activities in the course of the last six months, or who contributed their views in writing.

The following participated in Conversations on the Future of Europe in the World as speakers or moderators:

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Dr Anar Ahmadov

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The Hague, Friday, 17 September 2021

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Disclaimer

This paper aims to capture the mood, ideas and vision that emerged in the process of a dialogue exercise as part of ***The Hague Conversations on the future of Europe in the World*** held in The Hague from September 2021 to February 2022. The ideas and opinions reflected in this paper do not necessarily constitute the opinions of LINKS Europe, the City of The Hague or The Hague Humanity Hub.



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