

CSO-LA Consultation on Inclusive Multilateralism

Virtual meeting held 13 September 2021

Executive Summary

The Policy Forum on Development hosted a consultation organised by the Directorate-General for International Partnerships of the European Commission (DG INTPA) and the European External Action Service (EEAS) following the Joint Communication on strengthening the EU's contribution to rules-based multilateralism, issued in February 2021. The Communication calls for a truly inclusive multilateralism, where "the voices of civil society, the private sector, social partners and others count." In order to outline how this could be done in practice the consultation was organised to gather input from civil society and local authority partners. The timing coincided with the release of the UN Secretary General's report on "Our Common Agenda," outlining proposed actions to reinvigorate an inclusive, networked, and effective multilateralism; therefore, participants were given an overview of both reports and asked to share their reactions, highlighting who and what they see as key stakeholders, priority areas and ways of advancing inclusive multilateralism.

During the discussion, emphasis was put on **citizens as key stakeholders**. However, participants stressed the fact that not everyone has access to power and decision-making at the same level, and that steps must be taken to **change power imbalances** in order to ensure inclusiveness, notably for women and girls, youth and persons with disabilities. Multilateral spaces' credibility depends on more inclusive formats to meaningfully bring in the voices of traditionally marginalised groups. This has implications in the innovative design of consultation processes.

The **role and diversity of private sector** were taken up as part of the challenges of power imbalances. 90% of businesses across the world are SMEs, entrepreneurs, and artisans, who need to be included in the conversation. The need for private sector engagement was recognized, as was the need to work within frameworks to limit power imbalances.

The **key role of local and regional governments, cities and local communities**, and the need for their greater inclusion in multilateral spaces via increased presence in the governance systems of the EU and the UN was suggested.

Other stakeholders important for achieving inclusive multilateralism are: elected and appointed officials, political party activists and members, at national, regional and local level, especially those whose work focuses on civic participation and/or multilateral issues; decision makers within local CSOs and NGOs in partner countries; representatives of global multilateral organisations (e.g. African Union, Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Group of Five, Nordic Council of Ministers etc.); thought leaders, academia and scientific community.

The **priority areas** identified by the group were: governance and democracy; climate change; peace and security; digital transformation and digital divide; sustainable growth and jobs; and the social agenda, including education, health and social protection. The credibility of multilateral spaces will depend on inclusion through digital technologies, yet many people are still excluded. Participants noted that 58% of women and girls have experienced online harassment, which must be addressed to ensure gender-equal access.

In the discussion and follow up comments, several **priority processes** were suggested including: (1) raising awareness about participative multilateral and vertical governing structures amongst national and regional decision-makers; (2) building direct and institutionalised pathways in multilateral fora where the EU is a member, a cooperating and/or funding partner; (3) increasing transparency of

policymaking processes and ensuring access to stakeholders from the Global South; (4) strengthening organisational governance structures of civil society actors.

To advance the agenda, there is a need to strengthen local democracy, reduce power imbalances, eliminate barriers in decision making, guarantee rights and freedoms, promote more spaces for dialogue especially at local level, promote access for all to digital spaces, build on the UN major group system and expand citizens' opportunities to input into decision making.

There is a strong consensus among organisations that **the way forward towards inclusive multilateralism is to prove its legitimacy and effectiveness in the delivery of the SDGs**. The EU's human centric approach was praised, but **greater policy coherence** is required to see concrete outcomes on issues such as fair trade rules, debt cancellation, trade and agricultural policy alignment with the SDGs. In order to support civil society and build legitimate movements, more resources and a more sustainable funding approach (addressing systemic challenges) are needed.

The role of the EU in **promoting social dialogue** globally was stressed, as well as ensuring respect for human rights such as the right to association, organisation and collective bargaining. Participants stressed that EU support for universal agendas and normative agenda-setting is essential.

Participants called for expanded opportunities for citizens to take part in conversations and decision-making at UN level, including setting up a **UN parliamentary assembly**, which allows for the inclusion of elected representatives in the agenda-setting and decision-making of the UN, a **UN citizens' initiative** which enables people to put forward proposals on key issues of global concern for discussion and further action at the highest political levels (**inspired by the European Citizen's Initiative**), and a **UN Civil Society envoy**, to enable greater participation, spur inclusive convenings and drive the UN's outreach to the public and civil society organisations.

Some **positive examples** to potentially emulate include: the UN major group system, as it has a legitimacy that could be built upon if it were reformed and strengthened; the UN Committee on World Food Security, as one of the most successful multi-stakeholder spaces, where CSOs have an advisory role and monitor commitments and outcomes of the food security summits; the Coalition for the UN We Need (c4unwn.org); and the European Week of Action for Girls (EWAG), where girls raise their voices and share their thoughts and concerns. Good practices could be found also in the Conference on the Future of Europe. International civil society is involved in initiatives looking at how to evolve power shifts, such as Reinventing International NGOs.

Detailed report

I. Introduction and methodology

The Directorate-General for International Partnerships of the European Commission (DG INTPA) and the European External Action Service (EEAS), in collaboration with the Policy Forum on Development (PFD), organised a virtual consultation on inclusive multilateralism, to discuss the future work on the roll-out of the Joint communication on strengthening the EU's contribution to rules-based multilateralism (February 2021).

Marlene Holzner, Head of Unit of Local Authorities (LAs), Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and Foundations, G2 at INTPA, welcomed and thanked participants for joining the session, which was taking place as implementation is in the early stages, allowing participants to submit their ideas about its overall direction, not just fine-tune the details. Ms Holzner stressed that the PFD consultation process is of a significant added value to the work of the EU.

European Commissioner for International Partnerships, **Jutta Urpilainen**, delivered remarks through a video message. She noted how the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the interconnectedness in today's world and highlighted the challenges of socio-economic inequality, the climate crisis and the loss of biodiversity. The Commissioner stressed that we must build back better, with a focus on peace and security, health, climate and the rule of law. The Joint Communication on multilateralism focuses precisely on these aspects: regulating disparities of power in politics, promoting open societies and leaving no one behind. As multilateralism has been under strain for some time, there is a need to build back trust in international governance, including through ensuring the active participation of diverse stakeholders and giving a voice to women and youth. She concluded by stating that the EU's vision for inclusive multilateralism aligns with the UN process set in motion last year and that she looked forward to participants' recommendations.

Ellis Mathews, Head of Division, Multilateral relations of the European External Action Service, agreed that it was a good moment to be discussing inclusive multilateralism on the eve of the next UN General Assembly and one day after the release of the UN Secretary General's report on "Our Common Agenda" which incorporates the concept of inclusive and networked multilateralism. He explained that the EU's Joint Communication was intended to be a realistic assessment of the challenging geopolitical situation where the EU needs to better promote its values and interests. Mr Mathews stated that the communication went hand in hand with the current debates on strategic autonomy, to which a stronger EU voice on multilateralism is complementary and at times the only way of delivering on set goals. He reiterated that the EU was committed to international law and addressing the big challenges of our time – the climate crisis and fulfilling the SDGs. To do this, the EU wants to use all of its leverage – economic, regulatory and funding. This will require engagement from all of the EU – not just the institutions, but member states and civil society. Mr Mathews stressed that the EU wants to bring multilateralism into its bilateral and regional relations, as well as UN interactions.

The opening was followed by presentations from the European Commission on its Joint Communication on Strengthening EU's contribution to rules-based multilateralism and the United Nations on their "Our Common Agenda" report, which outlines plans to promote inclusive multilateralism. After clarification questions, the plenary dialogue focused on two guiding questions in relation to priorities, processes and actors, and the way to move the agenda forward. Written inputs received during the week following the meeting are included in this report.

II. Presentations of the EC's Joint communication on strengthening EU's contribution to rules-based multilateralism and its follow-up process, and of the UN's 'Our Common Agenda' report

Daniel Giorev, Head of Unit for Sustainable Development Policy and Global Partnerships with UN and IFIs presented the EC's Joint communication on strengthening EU's contribution to rules-based multilateralism and its follow-up process. He stressed that today's world is marked by significant geopolitical and economic power shifts that are challenging the established multilateral system. This is visible in the ongoing global geopolitical competition between the US, China and others, whose visions seem often incompatible with those of the EU. At the same time, the influence and voice of non-state actors, has increased, e.g., that of global tech companies. We are facing challenges such as natural disasters, climate change, poverty, terrorism, regional conflicts, migration flows as well as the COVID-19 pandemic. There is a feeling of disconnect of citizens from governance, as evident in attacks against democracy and increasing support for extreme political parties. Part of the solution to addressing these complex, sometimes interconnected challenges is a more inclusive, multilateral governance, which allows for the participation of CSOs, LAs, the private sector, science and academia.

The Joint communication sets up a more strategic vision for EU multilateral engagement. It aims to position the EU in a way which promotes its vision and values in the world. This involves: (1) the pursuance of the universal agendas: the Paris agreement, the 2030 Agenda and international human rights treaties; (2) making the world safer, as per the EU's peace agenda; since the EU is a peace project in itself, aiming to export this model through its external action; (3) building back better – more green, more inclusive, more digital. In view of the exacerbation of the challenges under the pandemic, the EU's agenda – the Green Deal, jobs and growth and digital transformation, must also be pursued internationally.

The EU aims to pursue these objectives by working to make the multilateral system fit for purpose. There is a need to reform some multilateral organisations, to make them more effective, inclusive and empowering. The EU is supporting the UN development system reform. The 2030 Agenda and the climate agenda must also be pursued as a guiding light. Better aligning the national and international conversations is an added value which the EU can bring. The EU will therefore apply a Team Europe approach, with EU institutions and member states rallying around common objectives, leveraging interests and speaking with one voice. This approach will allow members to join forces around more strategic priorities in funding. The EU will further aim to form partnerships and alliances around key objectives, moving beyond the donor-implementer relationship. Here, the beginning of the new EU financial cycle and its innovative instruments will serve as drivers for reforms and efficiency.

Inclusive multilateralism is a crucial part of ensuring the relevance of the multilateral system and preserving its legitimacy. It will allow the voices of stakeholders who are not sufficiently represented to be heard and to address key challenges together – this is what will drive the conversation for the next months and years.

Michelle Gyles-McDonnough, Director, Sustainable Development Unit, Executive Office of the Secretary-General, presented the UN's "Our Common Agenda" Process. The report is a starting point for ideas and initiatives on how to improve the multilateral institutions; the upcoming UN General Assembly session in New York will hopefully provide guidance from member states on how to implement it.

The Secretary General's report covers four areas: 1) a renewed social contract anchored in human rights' addresses the fact that much of the current global unease is rooted in poverty, lack of access to healthcare and/ or education and income inequality; 2) a future in solidarity with youth and future generations; 3) building resilience and preparing for future crises; and 4) UN institutional reform.

The UN Secretary General makes the following recommendations, among others:

1) About a renewed social contract:

- Tackling the "infodemic" of misinformation by introducing a global code of conduct that promotes integrity in public information
- Addressing tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance, money-laundering and illicit financial flows, through a new joint structure on financial integrity
- Reinvigorating our thinking around human rights, including our online lives
- Achieving universal social protection coverage, including universal health care, concretized at a World Social Summit in 2025
- Eradicating violence against women and girls and ensuring their full and equal participation, including in emergency response plans and backed by a global campaign to eliminate damaging social norms

- Correcting blind spots in how we measure progress and prosperity by introducing measures that complement the GDP measurement, and ensure profits do not come at the expense of people and planet

2) About solidarity with youth and future generations:

- Transformative measures on education, skills training and lifelong learning, including a Transforming Education Summit in 2022
- A Futures Lab to take full advantage of our unprecedented capacity to predict and model the impact of policy decisions over time
- The appointment of a Special Envoy for Future Generations and an upgraded UN Youth Office
- The repurposing of the Trusteeship Council to make it a deliberative body on behalf of succeeding generations
- A Declaration on Future Generations

3) About building resilience:

- Immediate steps for a global vaccination plan for COVID-19 and better integration of the global financial system with other decision-making processes through a Biennial Summit between the G20, ECOSOC, the Secretary-General and heads of international financial institutions
- Better preparedness for future global shocks through an Emergency Platform that would be triggered automatically in response to large-scale crises
- A Summit of the Future to forge a new consensus on the most critical global concerns – including peace, climate action beyond 2030, the digital commons and outer space
- A High-level Advisory Board, at the head of State/Government level, to inform the Summit of the Future and advance governance in the areas of greatest concern

4) About the UN institutional reform:

- Strengthening the UN as a source of reliable data and evidence by re-establishing the Secretary-General's Scientific Advisory Board
- Deepening engagement with local and regional governments, civil society, parliaments, and the private sector

While some of these recommendations will be taken forward by the UN system directly, others will require a wider conversation with member states. The common agenda must be a starting point for turning these recommendations into concrete action to make tangible and concrete change in people's lives.

Following the presentations, participants commented on:

- the importance of promoting the leadership of women and girls in all areas of the common agenda, such as climate action
- the role to be played by the UN in setting up binding norms to curb the influence of the market and corporate entities within a business and human rights framework.
- the need to analyse the intersectionality of vulnerabilities. A recognition that 'economic and political power go hand in hand' means efforts for levelling participatory access are needed to ensure participation of those who are more vulnerable and less likely to have access to the discussions.
- Promoting democracy and participation of civil society, by both the EU and UN, is essential in the current global environment, where in many places these are (as data shows) increasingly under attack.

Mr Giorev stressed the need to distinguish between the local and global inclusivity agendas, to see where there are points in common and how global conversations and processes can be linked. Inequalities remain an ongoing global challenge. From a sustainable development approach, there is an interest in encouraging corporate sector participation, as meeting the objectives of the 2030 Agenda would be impossible without their participation, including financially. However, any work with corporations must be around common principles.

Ms Gyles-McDonnough clarified that the understanding of civil society was that of a diversity of voices, also including the private sector. To achieve the 2030 Agenda, all stakeholders are needed at the table to ensure that financial flows are deployed in ways that help advance shared goals and principles. The voices of young people are especially crucial, so that decisions have a view to the future. With regards to combatting violence against women and girls, the Secretary General has spoken about the importance of addressing violence with a broadened view, including within a possible new agenda for peace. With regards to inequality, the common agenda stresses the need to renew the global social contract, with poverty and hunger needing to be addressed as well as inequalities and injustices.

The floor was then opened for a **plenary discussion**, centred around two guiding questions.

III. What are the priority areas and processes for more inclusive multilateralism? Who are the key stakeholders?

Participants thanked the EU and UN for their sense of urgency for change and need to act on multilateralism. There was agreement with the EU and UN's analysis of trends and challenges: rising inequalities, shrinking space and the pandemic have had a profound impact on young people, in particular girls and young women. There was also agreement that the EU support for universal agendas and normative agenda-setting is essential, anchored in human rights conventions and declarations.

Some **priority areas** identified are **governance and democracy; climate change; peace and security; digital transformation and digital divide; ensuring sustainable growth and jobs; and the social agenda, including education, health and social protection.**

Regarding the digital divide, it was mentioned that the credibility of multilateral spaces will depend on inclusion through **digital technologies** – however, far too many people are still excluded from the digital world. In addition, 58% of women and girls have experienced online harassment – this must be addressed to ensure accessibility, gender-equal access and a multilateralism based on true and equal participation. **Women and girls** aspire to lead, as evidenced by the EU week of action for girls organised by Plan International and other partners, which contributes to opening and making civic spaces safe and allowing young women to engage with policy makers.

With regards to **digital taxation**, it was pointed out that this was a good example of how the EU can position itself, but the fact that the Communication did not take into consideration the Global South - which includes a significant part of the digital consumer base - makes the analysis incomplete. The approach of Southern countries to issues of taxation is not the same as that of the EU, US or China.

Regarding **growth, employment and education**, participants pointed out that the pandemic has not had an equal impact on all. Education, employment prospects and the future of children in education are under threat and depend on actors such as the EU, which needs to build back better.

On **debt**, participants urged the EU to do much more, since there is no mention on how to intensify dialogue on multilateralism with civil society, making it unclear how this can be done. The example of Eurodad in convening meetings between EU institutions and CSOs was provided.

Some **priority processes** suggested to be included: (1) raising awareness about participative multilateral and vertical governing structures amongst national and regional decision-makers; (2) building direct and institutionalised pathways on multilateral fora, of which the EU is either a member, or a cooperating and/or funding partner, thus ensuring the voices of elected and appointed officials, civil society actors and political foundations, as well as all other relevant stakeholders, including those from emerging and developing economies are heard; (3) further increasing transparency of policymaking processes and ensuring access to stakeholders from the Global South, whose opportunities for contribution in the creation and implementation of relevant policy instruments are usually limited, whilst they are often most vulnerable to specific policy effects; (4) strengthening organisational governing structures of civil society actors; ensuring diversity in all the aforementioned processes, by including the voices of women and youth, as well as other marginalised groups.

The key **stakeholders** are **citizens**, however, they often lack access to decision-making processes. The issue of **power imbalances** between stakeholders was raised by several participants, building on the mention in the EU communication that it is not only the strong players who should be able to contribute to the conversations. However, participants indicated that the strong players continue to dominate multilateral spaces, as in the case of Covid-19 vaccines, debt and other issues. There was a question about how to democratise multilateral bodies, making them fairer in the input and outcome, as this will assist in defending common interests. Participants reflected on the importance of removing the **asymmetries in decision-making** and barriers in accessing multilateral spaces (including linguistic ones) which limit the participation of different cultures and generations. They reminded policy makers that inclusivity means that there should be a prior informed consultation ahead of all processes. In this regard, if multilateral discussions are opened up to other stakeholders via a consultation process, not only should those consultations respect certain criteria to ensure equitable participation, but the tendency of multi-stakeholder initiatives to favour those participants with more resources (money, time, etc) must be avoided. Special attention must be paid to the danger of 'corporate capture' of governance spaces.

The **role of the private sector** came out as a concern in relation to those power imbalances, as these actors are able to put their own priorities first, often at the expense of others. A broad definition of civil society, that includes private sector, could mask those power imbalances. The group was reminded that the private sector comprises a complex mix: 90% of businesses across the world are SMEs, entrepreneurs, artisans, who need to be included in the conversation, and participants also remarked there is a role for the private sector in achieving the 2030 Agenda. Within the scope of SDG 17 there could be potential for recognising these imbalances and making sure that the not-for-profit organisations receive financial support to take part on much more equal terms.

On the other hand, certain groups in society find it harder both to get information on consultation initiatives and to have their voices heard. Examples of such groups include women and girls and people with disabilities. Multilateral spaces' credibility depends on innovative and more inclusive formats, to meaningfully bring in the voices of traditionally marginalised groups. This again speaks to the need for great care in designing consultation processes, where accessible gender-equal technologies can act as a connector and as a catalyst for participation.

The **role of local and regional governments, cities and local communities**, and their inclusion in multilateral spaces, came out in several interventions, stressing their key role, for example in addressing climate issues. Participants stressed the need for **LAs** to have a bigger presence in the governance systems of both the EU and UN. This is crucial given that important processes happen in

cities and municipalities which relate to health, education, employment, combatting climate change and managing migration flows. LAs already have links and networks of discussion on how to improve the lives of their citizens, such as ideas for new production models and energy consumption. LAs can provide the most to those who have the least and they can strengthen and amplify the voices of those who are heard the least.

Other key stakeholders important for achieving inclusive multilateralism are: elected and appointed officials, political party activists and members, on national, regional and local level, especially those whose work focuses on civic participation and/or multilateral issues; decision makers within governing structures of local CSOs and NGOs in partner countries; international secretaries of global multilateral organisations (e.g., African Union, Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Group of Five, Nordic Council of Ministers etc.); thought leaders, academia and scientific community.

The importance of applying and communicating the **concept of multilateralism** to partner countries was highlighted, as it is often misunderstood. Some participants indicated that there is a need for the EU to understand other actors' positions on multilateralism to have a successful strategy of its own.

IV. Based on your experience in engaging in multilateral settings, how can we all advance the agenda of inclusive multilateralism both within and beyond the United Nations?

There is a strong consensus among organisations that the way forward towards inclusive multilateralism is to prove its legitimacy and effectiveness in the **delivery of the SDGs**, and ensuring policy coherence around them, with the inclusion of civil society at all levels. Two immediate areas of action are: i) ensuring equitable delivery of the Covid-19 vaccine and preparing for future pandemics ensuring vaccinations are regulated, produced and distributed as a global public good; and ii) the fulfilment of concrete, ambitious pledges at COP26, in line with IPCC recommendations in policy and finance and openly addressing the concept of 'common but differentiated' responsibilities. The SDGs are key in a human-centred recovery from the crisis. Through its targets on decent work, occupational health and safety, social protection, inclusive growth, and environmental preservation, SDG 8 has a fundamental role in showing the way to recovery and in driving the 2030 Agenda forward. It also plays a fundamental role in the call for a New Social Contract between governments, business and workers.

In terms of timing, participants indicated that what is missing is a **call for an urgent gathering at the highest levels to discuss the economic and climate emergency** and urged that such an initiative to be launched as soon as sanitary conditions permit.

The need to build **legitimate movements** and place more resources to help organisations survive and thrive where they are was pointed out. Where there is a challenge to engaging with states at the government level, it is possible to support CSOs to build understanding and buy in for multilateralism from within. Also the need to support a more meaningful sustainable **funding approach**, beyond the current calls for proposals, which do not allow for long term funding to address more systemic issues.

The EU's human centric approach was praised, but the need for concrete outcomes on issues such as fair trade rules, debt cancellation, trade and agricultural policy alignment with the SDGs – e.g., not undermining local food systems in partner countries, was stressed. The call for more **policy coherence** was also made in relation to the fact that there is still far too much funding and investment going to harmful activities that increase inequalities and not enough to indigenous peoples and women. **Social dialogue** is strongly valued as a key element in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of inclusive policies in the framework of the SDGs, as social dialogue is an effective tool to put in place socioeconomic reforms that guarantee ownership, breed strong results, and ensure greater levels of transparency and accountability. The role of the EU in promoting social

dialogue globally was stressed, as well as ensuring respect for human rights such as the right to association, organisation and collective bargaining. Distinguishing between right-holders (often economically and politically marginalised) and powerful stakeholders, to create safe spaces for right holders to organise and present their policy priorities.

Some participants stated that the UN system is not working very well but has improved its inclusiveness of new constituencies, and that there is a need to make sure that states stand up to the responsibility they have *vis-a-vis* their people. They called for expanded opportunities for citizens to take part in conversations and decision-making at UN level, including setting up a **UN parliamentary assembly**, which allows for the inclusion of elected representatives in the agenda-setting and decision-making of the UN, a **UN citizens' initiative** which enables people to put forward proposals on key issues of global concern for discussion and further action at the highest political levels (**inspired by the European Citizen's Initiative**), and a **UN Civil Society envoy**, to enable greater participation, spur inclusive convenings and drive the UN's outreach to the public and civil society organisations.¹ A point was also made about the need to consult with other multilateral institutions beyond UN, such as WTO, G7, G20, Bretton Woods institutions, etc. to make them more inclusive.

To address the democratic deficit in the UN and other institutions, some organisations indicated that national democracies need to be strengthened, as national governments are directly accountable to citizens. More efforts should be made to restore trust in democratic institutions, enhance transparency and deepen accountability.

Local and Regional Governments (LRGs) and their national associations should also be entrusted as policy partners. Granting official representation at multilateral fora to the Global Taskforce of LRGs was one concrete suggestion raised.

Some **positive examples** mentioned included the UN major group system, as it has a legitimacy that could be built upon if it were reformed and strengthened; the UN Committee on World Food Security, as one of the most successful multi-stakeholder spaces, where CSOs have an advisory role and monitor commitments and outcomes of the food security summits (such as the forthcoming UN Food Security Summit (UNFSS) and Nutrition for Growth (N4G)); the Coalition for the UN We Need (c4unwn.org); and the European Week of Action for Girls (EWAG), where girls raise their voices and share their thoughts and concerns. Good practices could be found also in the Conference on the Future of Europe. International civil society is involved in a number of related initiatives looking at how to evolve power shifts. One initiative, Reinventing International NGOs, is looking at building and testing power shift prototypes - moving beyond words and concepts to action in a social lab context: <https://rightscolab.org/ringo/>

Lastly, developing tandem learning programs on day-to-day practices on multilateralism, and integrating evaluation criteria for EU-funded programmes that emphasize multilateral governing structures was also suggested.

V. Concluding remarks

Diego Lopez (International Trade Union Confederation) gave the concluding remarks on behalf of CSOs. He summarised the interventions made by stating that it was important for the EU to strengthen its analysis of the situation and include missing elements: calling for an urgent high-level gathering to discuss the multiple crises facing the world, consider unequal power dynamics between

¹ For more information about these proposals, see comments from Democracy International

governments, strengthen the approach on debt, ensure more policy coherence and uplift human rights in discussions. Mr Lopez stressed the importance of working together in shaping multilateralism, highlighting that CSOs were a new pillar to be included in this process, ones that can build trust, inclusion and foster a new social contract. He stressed that to advance the agenda, there was a need to assume a plurality of vision, eliminate barriers in decision making, guarantee rights and freedoms, promote more spaces for dialogue, promote access for all to digital spaces, build on the UN major group system and expand citizens' opportunities to input into decision making. From a trade union perspective, inclusive social dialogue in all aspects of policy design and reforms will be key. Mr Lopez concluded by stating that the EU can play a strong role in promoting better inclusion in the UN and beyond.

Marlène Simeon (PLATFORMA) spoke on behalf of local authorities. She stressed that the 2030 Agenda can only be achieved by promoting the involvement of LAs, as they are the ones shaping and adapting policies to their contexts. Indeed, global agreements on issues like climate change and gender equality need buy-in from LAs and citizens to be implemented at local level. Ms Simeon further pointed out that local democracy, self-governance and dialogue at local levels was key, welcoming the UN's ambition to put partnerships in focus. She suggested that this could be done by spontaneously inviting LA representatives into EU representations to UN bodies. Furthermore, the EU can organize discussions and preparatory sessions ahead of UN-level events. Finally, she called for the enhancing of the role of the United Nations Advisory Committee of Local Authorities (UNACLA), providing LAs with observer status in the UN General Assembly and establishing an annual hearing for LAs. These calls could be supported and brought forward at the highest levels by the EU.

On behalf of the UN, **Ms Gyles-McDonnough** stressed that the EU and UN shared a common vision and agenda. She pointed out that it will become clear how to address the issues outlined as these processes move forward and remarked on the willingness among member states to keep up the pace. Ms Gyles-McDonnough hoped that state leaders would share their early reflections on the UN Secretary General's report next week. With regards to power imbalances, she stressed that addressing these was at the basis of this proposal for a new social contract. She further reiterated that there was a continued respect of the intergovernmental nature of the UN but at the same time a recognition that there was a need to fill existing gaps to allow a diversity of voices, including through multi-level governance and the recommendations on engaging citizens. With regards to the partnership between UN and EU on VAWG, Ms Gyles-McDonnough stressed the importance of placing young women front and centre.

On behalf of DG INTPA, **Mr Giorev** welcomed the synergies between the EU and UN approach on a more inclusive multilateralism (as highlighted in the EU Joint Communication and the UN SG Our Common Agenda report) while pointing out that implementation will be key. For the EU, the challenge will be leveraging its status, jointly with its Member States. While the EU has an enhanced observer status at the UN, this is not the case under the Bretton Woods system or within other international financial institutions (IFIs). He was confident that the EU can find a way to be the voice and champion of civil society and vice versa. Mr Giorev stressed that think tanks, academia and the private sector are part of civil society, with a richness of experience and knowledge to bring.

On behalf of the EEAS, **Mr Mathews** welcomed the huge potential for joint work between the UN and EU. He suggested that one of the most immediate contributions that the EU could make would be to encourage member states to press for follow up on the UN Secretary General's "Our Common Agenda" report in the UN General Assembly and other UN bodies. The EU is well-placed to be a champion and defender of civil society in UN processes, whose inclusion is opposed by certain actors. He stressed that progress could be made on the Global Public Goods agenda, as there is a prospect of bringing together key players to deliver on common goals such as tackling the pandemic despite

systemic differences; he stressed that the peace and security agenda is also strongly promoted by the EU, for instance by supporting a stronger role for the UN Peacebuilding Commission. Mr Mathews reminded the participants that the Conference on the Future of Europe is as an opportunity for citizens and civil society to contribute to shaping the EU's future agenda.

Ms Holzner thanked the participants and closed the event.