

ValUE – SOLIDARITY MATTERS IN A LEADING EUROPE

FINAL EVENT

Hybrid/Atelier 29, Brussels, 12.07.2022, 10.00-12.00

Welcoming Remarks

Elisa Gambardella, SOLIDAR Foundation, welcomes everyone at the concluding event of the project *ValUE – Solidarity Matters in a Leading Europe* which was co-funded by [the Europe for Citizens Programme](#). She remarks on the four main considerations that lie at the very heart of the project's conception. First, the project stems from the idea that European citizenship could be more impactful and meaningful if it would be strongly related to the principle of solidarity and social rights. Secondly, the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) – which was about to start at the time – represented an occasion to find an outlet for this idea. Moreover, she explains that the pandemic demonstrated clearly how local and cross-border solidarity are closely related and provided a new context to debate social challenges at the local level, showing the actual impact of a solidarity-driven approach to national and European policies vis á vis nationalist policymaking. As a fourth consideration, there was the fact that the pandemic proved the role of CSOs in keeping solidarity alive in the most difficult times and provided an opportunity to discuss these topics in terms of citizens' engagement and outreach by CSOs.

She explains that to address these considerations, the project was implemented in 9 different countries to ensure a diversity of the engaged communities. The implemented trainings, called Solidarity Labs, were guided by participatory methodologies based on NFIL which were applied in different ways depending on the audience. She clarifies that a common methodological framework was in place for all Labs, thanks to project partner [Patatrac](#) that trained the other partners to ensure a homogenous implementation of the project. As a focus of their Solidarity Labs, each partner identified a locally and globally relevant issue for local communities. Project partners discussed:

- Life Skills, in Greece, with [DAFNI KEK](#)
- Community Building, in Romania, with [ANFMR](#)
- Precariousness, in Estonia, with [JMK](#)
- Engaging in solidarity actions, in France, with [LA LIGUE](#)
- Education for All, in Croatia, with [CPS](#)
- Solidarity for Social Inclusion, in Italy, with [ARCS](#)
- The Climate Crisis, in Sweden, with [ABF](#)
- Migration, in Spain, with [MPDL](#)

She remarks that more than 500 direct participants with different backgrounds and age groups have been engaged so far. The Solidarity Labs delivered a collection of diverse definitions of the concept of solidarity. This resulted in the *SoliDictionary*, a meaningful tool that reflects the understanding of solidarity across European countries and divergent communities, exemplifying the European motto: united in diversity. She explains that this publication is not static, as the project aims to raise

awareness and engage more European residents in the debate on the EU on a long-term basis. Therefore, a [Web-Documentary](#) was created in which the work of participants can be found back and which can be used for dissemination purposes and serve as a tool for any organization/individual that wants to learn about NFIL methodologies for citizens engagement.

She remarks that the project's results were a success as these directly fed into the debate on the CoFoE, both by the induction session on the CoFoE that was given in all Labs and because two of the partner organizations, SOLIDAR and Volonteurope took part in the Conference Plenary through the CSO Convention for the CoFoE. Though the pandemic has slowed down the pace of these projects, its timeline was successful.

The main conclusions drawn by the project's consortium are that the project proved that the citizenry that is interested in getting involved in the debate on the future of the EU is way wider and more diverse than what is commonly assumed and that reaching out to citizens with different backgrounds, and outside capitals requires specific expertise, which cannot be improvised by institutions. This calls for further cooperation with CSOs for the implementation of policies aimed at social inclusion and for fostering democratic participation in the EU and neighboring countries. Further, the project proved that there is a widespread understanding that the EU's future can only be sustainable and democratically supported by citizens if it is discussed at the local level. The project's definitions of solidarity also demonstrated that not only a European citizenship that is tightly linked to social rights would be welcomed and supported, but also that transnational solidarity is understood in its local dimension. While it remains to be seen what the follow-up on the CoFoE will look like, these are important hints for policymakers to work within the boundaries of the current Treaties (e.g. implementing the EPSR; implementing article 11 for the Civil Dialogue), and for stronger engagement with CSO's in policy making and implementation.

Keynote speech: Solidarity at the heart of the Future of Europe

Maria Joao Rodrigues, FEPS President, expresses her appreciation for the project and draws attention to the fact that we are at an important moment to test European solidarity. She notes that whenever the EU faces an existential challenge, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, it becomes clear that it is impossible to overcome these kinds of challenges without a much stronger notion of solidarity. Especially given the current challenges the EU is facing, she recalls that solidarity should be the key basis for the EU to cope with such existential problems. She also remarks that the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#) has brought a new commitment to making social rights possible for all European citizens.

However, she continues that these commitments are confounded by a lack of financial means and a need to transform governments. Civil society organizations that are at the forefront of these issues should have a stronger platform. Identifying other challenges regarding EU social policy, she notes that we need to promote solidarity in Europe for better access to public health systems, access to lifelong learning for all EU workers and citizens, and a decent and sustainable pension for all. She states that an upgrade is needed regarding certain EU competencies related to health, education and social protection moving them to shared competences. This also applies to a revision of decision-making procedures related to policy on social inclusion and education where more room should be made for deciding by a qualified majority instead of voting by unanimity. She also points out that the financial means are needed to face the current challenges, such as rising energy costs, inflation and the increasing costs of vital goods and services. She concludes that organized civil society should be

supported on a high level and that a stronger call for participatory citizenship in the EU's political system is needed on all levels, not only on the local and national levels but also on the EU level.

Presentation of the Main Results and Methodologies of the Solidarity Labs conducted in the frame of ValUE – Solidarity Matters

Angeliki Giannakopoulou, DAFNI KEK, Greece, presents the outputs of her organization, Dafni Kek, a center for research and adult education. She explains that they carried out four instalments of the Solidarity Labs (all face to face) with the overarching theme of *Life Skills for Europe*. The Labs sparked conversation on what is essential in the life of EU citizens and how the work of CSOs can assist in this. One of the main aims of the Labs was to engage as much of a diverse target group as possible.

The first instalment of the Lab was aimed at 25 citizens belonging to a local youth group and was focused on imagining communities that are truly solidary and to question social roles, class systems and preconceptions and the effect on them on solidarity. During the main activity and with the help of theater exercises participants had to discover the social rank that was assigned to them as well as the extent of familiarity, solidarity and respect other members of their community have for them. Afterwards, a thorough discussion took place on the concept of civic engagement, class and privilege concerning how we act solidary to one another. The key definition for the Solidictionary that was created within this lab was one on Civic Engagement. She explains that the idea was not to create an academic definition that fits everybody but one that fits the target group. The second event which involved 25 people from Dafni Kek's community with a mixed background, aimed to have the participants create their own stories based on photographs related to communication and interpersonal competencies in the concept of a world that is moving towards solidarity but which has not yet reached that goal. The key definition for the Solidictionary that was created within this Lab was one on Interpersonal Capabilities.

The third instalment, also involving 25 citizens, was aimed at a more senior group of people of which the majority has a background in the educational sector. This Lab aimed to question participants' solidarity mentalities, reflect on what a sustainable society is and imagine the transition from a non-solidary society to a solidary one. The key activity consisted of a game on perception and cooperation to explore participants' solidary reflexes and ideas on sustainability. The game encouraged participants to consider how conflict and a non-solidary society work. At the end, there was a group discussion on the concepts of sustainability and inclusion. The key definition for the Solidictionary that was created within this lab was Sustainability Competence. The final Lab, involving 27 participants, was held in Cyprus and aimed to highlight social dynamics and solidarity during isolation. Participants were asked to act out short theatrical pieces on how isolation affected relationships, feelings, caring and communication. The definition the participants discussed was about intercultural communication capabilities. Besides the four instalments of the Solidarity Labs Dafni Kek also carried out 6 interviews with participants and facilitators in the Solidarity Labs. She then screens [a short video on the Solidarity Labs held by Dafni Kek](#).

Git Sundberg, ABF, Sweden updates participants about the Lab organized last April in Gävle, Sweden. She shortly introduces her organization, the Workers Educational Association and their values. She then explains the methodology that was used throughout the Solidarity Lab: the informal learning method of *folkbildning*. The Lab aimed to create an understanding among participants of the concept

of solidarity, to create interest in further activities and initiate theme work in the youth clubs, and to raise awareness for practical solidarity actions in participants' local environment. Participants were young people between 10 to 16 years old from three different youth clubs based in a rural area and had not prepared anything in advance.

The participants worked on the themes of climate change/climate crisis which were connected to local events of flooding and heavy snowfall, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the crisis in Ukraine. Participants were tasked to define what solidarity means for themselves and what practical solidarity matters are in a time of crisis. She explains that there were some concerns regarding the organization of the workshop: it was held voluntarily and organized on a Saturday during springtime. She concludes that the participants' previous knowledge of the concept of solidarity was rather poor, that the interest in a matter increases when it is spoken about understandably and that it is important to let young people use their own words on important matters. In the end, the workshop was successful and resulted in making participants understand that solidarity is something you do together.

Iva Zenzerovic, Centre for Peace Studies (CPS), Croatia, shortly introduces CPS whose work aims to protect human rights and promote social change. She then goes on to explain their Solidarity Lab which was organized in connection with CPS' flagship educational programme which is a 6-month non-formal education programme that reflects on citizens' perspectives and bottom-up engagement towards a more just society and positive peace. The Solidarity Lab was organized over two sessions. First, the preparatory workshop focused on the role of civil society in Croatia and provided an overview of civic self-organization since the eighties. In the second session, titled the *Faces of Solidarity Today*, the World Café discussion method was used which encourages participation and is suitable for big groups. Fifty participants rotated throughout different moderated discussions which focused on topics such as solidarity mechanisms on systemic levels, solidarity in the education system, solidarity and migration, civic solidarity in recent crises, solidarity and/or humanitarian work. This resulted in discussions on the meaning of solidarity today and definitions that were added to the Solidictionary.

To close this session, short videos on the Solidarity Labs held in [Sweden](#) and [Croatia](#) were screened.

Policy discussion on the results and added value of the project

Introduced by Elisa Gambardella, **Godelieve Dutrieux, EACEA, Deputy Head of Unit Citizens and EU Values**, commends the results of the project and notes that the word 'citizen' has taken a central role in every Lab. She calls this a success since reaching citizens at the individual level is exactly what the [Europe for Citizen's Programme](#) (2014-2020) and its successor the [Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme](#) (CERV, 2021-2027) aimed to do. She thanked the speakers for presenting their initiatives.

Oonagh Aitken, Board Member Volonteuropa adds that the impact of the VALUE project on citizens of all ages and the understanding of solidarity and the key values of the EU is striking. She notes that this is a way for CSOs and partnerships to get close to citizens and communities.

Elisa opens the floor for questions. Since no participant has any she asks Godelieve whether she could share how the CERV Programme addresses solidarity and EU citizenship.

Godelieve explains that as already apparent from the first word of its name, the [Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme \(CERV\)](#) aims to place citizens at the very forefront. Moreover, with the increase of the budget up to a total of €1.5 billion, Europe commits to engaging more citizens than

ever before at an individual level through these funding instruments. She also acknowledges the important role for Civil Society Organisations in this frame, and thus she underlines the shown willingness of the Commission to provide more opportunities for CSOs for direct engagement of citizens in the debate on European democracy, including its solidarity component.

Elisa thanks Godelieve for her answer. She then asks Oonagh what she thinks of the role of civil society in these processes when hearing about the challenges and issues that were tackled in course of the project.

Oonagh answers that there are several policy areas where CSOs can get involved in policy making. She mentions the CoFoE and the High Level Conference Civil Society, the Future of Europe which took place at the end of June in Paris and also refers to Article 11 of the Treaty on European Union. She remarks that one of the major opportunities to increase CSO involvement in EU policy-making is to provide more funding for civil society organizations. This would enable more people at the grassroots level to get involved. She refers to the work of Volonteuropa which engages young volunteers and supports them and by doing so is able to reach citizens. She concludes that projects funded by the EU such as ValUE are great opportunities to involve citizens to participate in reflecting on EU policy.

Elisa thanks both of the speakers for their interventions and gives the floor to participants for more questions.

Piotr Sadowski, Secretary General, Volonteuropa asks Godelieve Dutrieux how the CERV Programme was adapted to spread a message of solidarity and citizenship to candidate countries or countries that are not part of the EU.

Godelieve answers that the CERV Programme consists of four main strands and within those strands, only one is dedicated specifically to the EU Member States. She notes that association agreements with candidate countries are possible and that those countries can participate in some parts of the Programme.

Interactive session: reflecting different understandings of Solidarity in Europe

Participants are invited to reflect in small groups on their own and different understandings of solidarity in Europe.

Concluding remarks

Piotr Sadowski, Secretary General, Volonteuropa delivers the concluding remarks by stressing that the conference has proven that the ValUE project has been very successful as it reached over 500 participants, of which every single one of them can be considered to be a multiplier. He notes that the project has also succeeded in translating the concept of European citizenship into a more approachable language which proves to people that they have a belonging in Europe. He then asks each of the groups to give a brief overview of their discussion and the definition of solidarity they came up with.

Isabel Sanz, MPDL, shares that for her group solidarity means having the intention to be supportive and to try to be with other people and not for other people. This way community evokes that all together we are something bigger.

Angeliki Giannakopoulou, Dafni Kek, explains that her group understands solidarity as something mutual and not unilateral and that citizenship is an essential part of reaching a solidary future.

Laura Chamas, La Ligue, shares that her group views solidarity as a feeling of social utility and that it means setting up a horizontal relationship with others. Solidarity should also be based on a collective and systemic vision and it would be important to keep it alive beyond times of crisis.

Piotr thanks the groups for their inputs and congratulates all project participants. He notes that a lot of progress was made in challenging times. He highlights that when we talk about citizens, we talk about every person that is making Europe a home, and not just the individuals with EU passports. He thanks SOLIDAR Foundation for their work on this project and the European Commission and the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) for their support. He also thanks all participants that are present.

He continues by stressing the importance of solidarity in society during crises such as the pandemic and the war in Ukraine but underlines that solidarity should take place at all times. He praises all the volunteers that were involved in the course of the project and the high degree of diversity that the project enjoyed. He adds that solidarity implies cooperation and understanding but also entails respect and appreciation for others both on the European level and national level. He draws attention to the fact that on the national level, the civil society sector is often neglected and discriminated against and calls upon EU institutions to ensure that rule of law and rights of those that speak for the disadvantaged are secured.

He refers to what Elisa said in her opening remarks on CoFoE and agrees that with these processes it might sometimes be difficult to find a citizenship-driven direction. He also refers to the [High Level Conference Civil Society, the Future of Europe](#) and emphasizes that the Future of Europe is only ours when human and social rights are safeguarded and the work of civil society protected. Regarding the latter, he points out that the corporate sector enjoys far more freedom to operate across the EU than CSOs. On a personal level, he reflects on the right to associate by giving the example of volunteering at the Pride Parade in Madrid. He emphasizes that we need to continue fighting for a free Europe as the right to live in freedom can be dismantled, as illustrated by current events in the US, and that this transcends further to all our rights.