



**Statement on the start of the French Presidency of the Council of the EU**  
**by Séamus Boland, President of the Diversity Europe Group**  
01/01/2022

May I send my best wishes to the French government, which will assume the Presidency of the Council of the EU, today on January 1<sup>st</sup> 2022. The challenges facing citizens in the Union are well documented and require strong and compassionate leadership. Europe can be proud of its management of COVID-19. In particular, the distribution of vaccines, ensuring that all citizens across the EU were reached. Equally, the determination to deliver fast and secure research, demonstrates the enormous strength of a Europe.

It is important that this Presidency of the Council of the EU makes progress on three main issues that currently define the lives of Europeans:

1. The establishment of a strong health union, already promoted by President von der Leyen;
2. The establishment of a comprehensive and environmentally based 'Just Transition' programme, which is necessary to achieve the objectives of climate change;
3. To advance on an overarching policy on digitalisation, so that Europe becomes a leader in this a new economy that is fit for future generations.

Clearly the outcome/s of the Conference of the Future of Europe (CoFoE) will shape this future. In this regard, the involvement of citizens through the Citizens Panels must be accompanied by the involvement of civil society organisations at the same level of social partnership. In this way the CoFoE will emerge as a unique and new exercise in terms of outcomes. The EU has a unique opportunity to overcome the democratic deficit, which excludes various groups of citizens who over the past few years have made clear that they no longer feel connected to policy making. In contrast, civil society has demonstrated its incredible ability to assist citizens in their own communities, as witnessed during the COVID crisis and the recent and recurrent occurrences of extreme weather. I would like to recommend that the French Presidency signals a strong intention to begin the process of recovery in a manner that does not penalise the poorer sections of our society.

Finally, I would commend the French government's insistence that Europe becomes a leader in the field of the defence of human rights. It is imperative that the progression of the EU is identified with the progression of human rights. Concrete success will be achieved by ensuring that civil society organisations active in these areas are supported and protected by strong legislation.