

**FUNKY
FRIDAYS**

EVENT REPORT — SPRING 2019

CITIZENS FOR EUROPE

Europe NEEDS YOU!

 friends
of europe





“Europe has to be a feeling, not just an idea.”

This assertion, originally invoked by musician Bono, was cited as one of the key inspirations for the theme of discussions that took place during Friends of Europe’s ‘Citizens for Europe: Europe NEEDS YOU!’ event, according to one of its speakers.

Held in Brussels on 3 May 2019 as part of Friends of Europe’s ongoing Funky Friday series, the event was organised in the aim of targeting volunteers from the European Solidarity Corps, and was designed to increase participants’ understanding of the European Union, its history, achievements and challenges, guiding them towards being active ambassadors of the European project. Through a mixture of brainstorming activities, dialogue-driven debate and interactive exercises, the event set out to demonstrate the EU’s ability to affect real change in the lives of Europeans across all member states.

The event was moderated by Tamsin Rose, Senior Fellow at Friends of Europe, and featured discussions from two high-level speakers, known for their occupation of senior positions within the EU institutions: Bob Cox, formerly of the European Commission and Trustee at Friends of Europe, and Steve Clark, Director for the European Parliament Liaison Offices.

Before the speakers embarked on their respective presentations, participants were invited to engage in ‘bio-hacking’, an activity by which those in attendance were encouraged to splice together a collage of multifarious animal features on paper, constructing an animal creation that would, in the words of Tamsin Rose, be visually representative of “what we think Europe could be and should be”.

Elaborating on the notion that the EU is a designed construction rather than a naturally-evolving phenomenon, Rose highlighted the malleability of the European Union’s framework, underscoring its ability to adapt to the ever-changing demands of citizens. “When the EU asks citizens what they want from the EU, they tend to ask around policy areas. But in reality, it’s

about emotional connections and values”, Rose said, after observing the prevalence of elephant features in the various pieces of artwork, thereby deducing a correlation between what citizens want from the EU and the symbolic realm of memory, level-headedness and emotional sensitivity.

Bob Cox’s ‘Rediscovering Wonder’ talk undertook a topographical exploration of Brussels in the form of a spoken walking tour, reconciling EU policies with the everyday routines of Europeans. From assessing water safety standards from the privacy of one’s own kitchen to musing over European healthcare systems during a standard check-up appointment, Bob Cox’s narratively inventive presentation demonstrated how decisions taken at EU level can impact even the most mundane of day-to-day activities. After establishing a holistic view of the EU’s societal reach, Cox concluded with an acknowledgement of the upcoming meeting of EU leaders at the Sibiu Summit, scheduled to take place on 9 May 2019, at which the EU would lay out its strategic agenda for the period 2019-2024.

Is it possible to conceive of a Europe of citizens as opposed to a Europe of member states? This question formed the basis of Steve Clark’s ensuing discussion, one that tracked the transition from a policy-driven Europe to one motivated instead by emotion. “When you’re about to lose something, you come to appreciate its worth”, said Clark, alluding to the recent People’s March in London which saw millions take to the streets to express their dissatisfaction with the Brexit result. “It was about a feeling. These people felt European and felt as though they were losing something valuable to them”, he observed, commenting on the irony inherent in the fact that the most committed and dynamic pro-European movement was being pursued in a country currently in the process of an EU departure.

Clark’s insistence on the importance of emotional messaging overlapped with the theme of the brainstorming sessions that subsequently followed. Given the understanding that citizens should play a greater role in the EU, participants agreed that the EU should establish better communication channels between citizens and the institutions to compensate for citizens’ growing alienation from politics. To encourage citizen engagement, it was agreed that emotion and feeling should play an integral part.

