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# Report

## Digital transition in the capital cities and the role of the trade unions

21st European Capital  
Cities Conference – online

# 25 and 26 January 2022

## **List of participating trade union organisations:**

CATU Belgrade, CCOO Madrid, CFDT Paris, CGIL Rome, CGT Paris, CGTP-IN Lisbon, CISL Rome, DGB Berlin, EKA Athens, GWU La Valletta, LBAS Riga, MTUF Moscow, PODKREPA Sofia, SAK Helsinki, SEK Nicosia, TUC LESE London, UGS Nezavisnost Belgrade, UGT Madrid, UIL Rome, URIF-UNSA Paris, plus ETUC and ETUI

**Tuesday 25 January 09.30**



**Christina Theochari** (Coordinator) welcomed everyone – the decision to go online had not been easy, but nonetheless we have attendance by 14 capitals, 20 trade union organisations, and 44 participants.

The work done on the training course in October and November had laid the ground positively for the Conference and we know that European Capitals need to approach and anticipate these digital transitions.

Today is the end of the Permanent Committee's mandate and we will elect a new PC.

Many thanks to Luca Visentini (ETUC) and Vera Dos Santos Costa (ETUI) for their continued support for our network. She introduced Vera.

**Vera Dos Santos Costa** (ETUI Director, Education Department) said the network is unique and has shown its relevance over the past two difficult years.



Digitalisation is not a new question but green sustainability and digitalisation provoke huge challenges with their parallel but different development. The ETUI's programme of training for the ECTUN network has been a success with high participation and quality results.

The consequences and challenges of climate change have not always been considered central to the identity of trade unions. ETUI has raised this to enable and help trade unions to deal with the topic and aspires to become the key reference point of climate change and technological developments.

More is required from trade unions in capital cities and this network. We need actions that should include training and capacity building. Vera thanked Ulisses Garrido for his vision and said the ETUI will continue to support the network. She thanked Christina and Alina Caia for their contributions and the Serbian colleagues for their partnership in this conference.

**Christina** thanked Vera for her comments and sincerely hoped to be in person in Belgrade next year. She introduced Dragan representing the Belgrade partners.

**Dragan Todorodic** (CATUB) echoed the hope that we would meet in Belgrade next year and expressed thanks to Christina, Vera and Ulisses for their support. He said it was a pleasure to be part of the ECTUN network with its support and solidarity.



The focus of all our work is the worker. Digitalisation becomes one of the main catalysts of innovation. The outcomes of the training seminar were very useful to us as we aim for the green recovery and a just transformation.

**Christina** then made a tribute to **Franco Fatiga** who had died since the last conference. He had been a founding member of ECTUN and was an elected member of the Permanent Committee when he died. He had been born in Calabria in 1939, his mother died when he was young and he moved to Rome. He worked in insurance and joined UIL in 1966.



He was a stalwart supporter of socialism and international solidarity (for instance, the Eritrean people's struggle for independence).

A key figure in ECTUN's history he launched the idea in the 1980s, attending the first meeting and initiating the first permanent conference with the organising triad. Costs made this difficult to

continue and he supported the ongoing collaboration with the ETUC and ETUI. There have been difficult moments but Franco always worked for cohesion and his vision for the future. A video clip of Franco speaking on 1 May 2012 was shown.

**Christina** outlined the procedure for the Permanent Committee elections – one vote per trade union organisation. The ballot would be electronic and taken later in the afternoon.

Many delegates made introductory remarks.



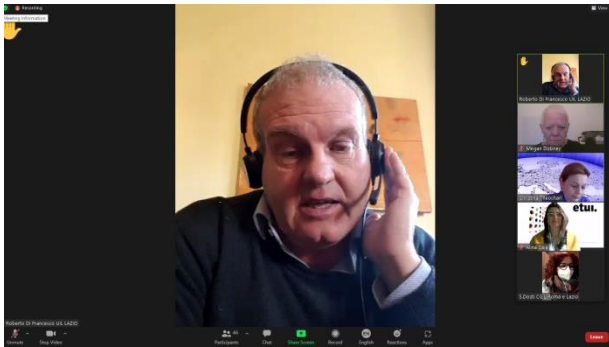
**Jason Deguara** GWU La Valletta opened by sending greetings to all delegates.



**Jose Maria Hernandez Martinez** is moving to a national role in the UGT – Christina warmly thanked him for his contributions to ECTUN.



**Carlo Constantini** CISL Rome referenced Franco Fatiga’s ability to seek a resolution to difficult issues, and commented on the opportunity for capitals to access EU funds for Covid-19 recovery.



**Roberto di Francesco** UIL and **Shqiponja Dosti** CISL spoke of the areas in Rome with poor internet connection and the exclusion of families with inadequate hardware, increasing the gap between rich and poor.



**Laurent Pagnier** CGT pointed out that in Paris many had to access the internet through their mobile phones, and that the changes in consumption, delivery and UBERisation had led to more precarious work.



**Libério Domingues** CGTP Lisbon said we owe homage to Franco Fatiga, a man who dedicated his life to trade union solidarity – we are poorer without him.

**Sara Canavezes** CGTP Lisbon said the theme of the conference is very relevant – trade unions are not opposed to change, but we want to enhance workers’ rights not just see businesses getting richer. The new teleworking reality means more challenges for trade unions, and revenues based on algorithms are a cross-cutting reality. Portugal has the third highest proportion of workers connected to digital platforms, with special legislation for platform work often being based on the wrong idea with lack of transparency, false self-employment, lack of tools to supervise working conditions. Trade union membership has grown in Lisbon with Uber and Bolt workers protesting against the lack of social security and the lack of a collective framework.

**Christina Theochari** EKA Athens apologised for the absence of her general secretary **Costas Koulouris** – he was dealing with the unexpected snow storms. The implications of digitalisation on the world of work are a major challenge for trade unions. We need investment in digital skills for all and higher standards for training and re- and up-skilling workers.



**Mikhail Antontsev** MTUF also paid tribute to Franco Fatiga. In Moscow they have signed a tripartite agreement with government and employers, and established MTUF education centres for digital communications for trade union activists. Remote working is an issue with people working from Australia and Japan, and taxi drivers on virtual platforms. There is surveillance from many cameras – but it has meant that crime has reduced. Local elections in 2021 used electronic voting systems and MTUF education members on the procedures. 2022 is declared the “Year of Information Policy and Trade Union Activity Digitalisation”. He noted that digital cooperation from ECTUN members sending videos to the MTUF conference showed the value of ECTUN’s work.



**Anelio Corsi** CGIL Rome said it’s not about being for or against digitalisation – the question is to analyse it – at present the control is in the hands of the companies. We need a digitalisation social policy to oppose the negative effects – new jobs are often part-time and precarious, and recovery plans focus on businesses and not on people. We must exploit the collective intelligence of trade unions. Three trade union confederations in Rome approached the mayor on the strategic development of the city.

**Christina** informed delegates that there is a network of mayors in European capital cities. They have an Agreement on digitalisation in the capitals. We have previously discussed contacting this network but resources didn’t allow.



**Laurie Heselden** TUC LESE London said that the experience in London reflects that of other cities. There has been a rapid increase in digitalisation in everyday life and an increase in marginalisation due to lack of competence, facilities or desire. We’ve seen an increase in blended working, remote working, zero hour contracts, and surveillance. Also an increase in use by trade unions organising their own members. An example in London is the Musicians Union, which has few static workplaces, moving entirely to virtual branches. There have been campaigning and organising changes also – the TUC has moved almost all its education online from face to face. And all this was accelerated by Covid-19. Social dialogue is not so well developed in England although there are some committees that include trade unions; it tends to be lots of business people and one trade union voice. We’ve asked the Mayor for a sectoral approach and to include trade unions in discussions. We are pushing hard but not there yet.

Christina welcomes **Luca Visentini**, general secretary of the ETUC.



Luca disclosed that he had been tested Covid-19 positive last night, but few problems so far. He will address digitalisation particularly and our responses and will draw attention particularly to three areas.

First is telework – known as “smart working” in Italy. It existed before Covid-19 but the outbreak has increased it. There is few work areas not involved – such as transport and food preparation. The problems we faced before have increased significantly. Trade union action is more complex. It’s difficult to protect Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) conditions, and there are also risks of discrimination in payments and working conditions such as working time. The elephant in the room is the right to disconnect – digitalisation mustn’t lead to people being contacted by bosses at any time of day.

Second is the actual digitalisation of production processes – machines partially or totally replacing workers. This is the digital transition, transforming traditional relationships and types of jobs. It brings the need for reskilling and often goes with climate transition, greening production – it is much interconnected. There are opportunities to make our economy greener and for better working conditions and climate position. It can also lead to job disruption and elimination of jobs and the transformation of jobs creating problems for workers changing roles and working conditions. So key is how to protect workers and how trade unions manage a just transition.

Third is the situation of workers completely in the digital economy – such a platform work like food delivery and transport – Uber and Deliveroo etc.

other platforms in the media are developing software in the innovative economy. Traditional sectors are introducing new technology and platform workers digital from the start – often precarious and difficult to negotiate. So how to get the same conditions for these workers?

The challenges are of the present not the future. We have developed important tools to address these challenges. Are you aware and can make the best use of these tools? What can the ETUC do to support you?

There is an old agreement on teleworking in the European Union – an agreement with the social partners from 20 years ago. The situation is now different of course. It has been transposed into law in many countries. And there are framework agreements, or collective bargaining agreements on the subject. We have to revisit and integrate new elements and fill the gaps in existing agreements. We have tried to negotiate at European Union level on this topic, first concluded in March 2020. It’s not a legislative agreement but raised awareness amongst social partners. It contains recommendations for action for trade unions, employers and public authorities seeking to build stronger partnerships on training and upskilling. It’s a good agreement but not binding. It wasn’t addressing the issues heightened by the pandemic.

And also the ETUC and the ITUC are campaigning for legal frameworks for the right to disconnect. Some countries have developed such laws – in and out of Europe –and also on privacy and data protection. The situation is unequal and fragmented so we are in dialogue with the European Commission and the European Parliament for legislation. If we succeed it will take a year before coming in. we also want to influence outside of Europe – such as ILO frameworks.

On the second element, digital transition, there is legislation but we need more. Automation etc is disrupting jobs. We need massive public investment for new jobs. And social dialogue to ensure trade unions is properly involved. It’s a

complex process and not easy to manage. We need public authorities to come together with social partners at national, regional and sectoral levels.

A strong transition framework will require a massive amount of money for job creation where jobs will be disrupted. We need to involve all partners and ensure public money is properly spent, but employers and politicians are reluctant for this process. Politicians need to understand that if it is not managed well social unrest and democracy are at risk.

Finally, on platform work – there are so many young workers involved with not protection or collective bargaining – we need this at all levels. The European Commission has published a proposal for a directive on platform working – we are in negotiations on this.

So there are three main challenges – telework, just transition, and platform working and we have to work together on them.

Christina thanked Luca for his intervention and opened the floor to delegates.



**Ulisses Garrido** ETUI raised the important issue of the algorithms that are controlling workers' jobs more and more, as well as the social control exercised by them. Also the question of the capital regions – where there is a concentration of population, many highly qualified workers, and at the same time more platforms such as Uber. On this, what does the ETUC need from ECTUN?

**Laurie Heselden** TUC LESE London spoke about the right to disconnect and the alienation of workers

when their job is controlled by a machine or an algorithm – this can breed anxiety and stress. He suggested that London has stronger legislation on health and safety than elsewhere – how can we use it?



**Diana Agostinello** CGIL Rome asked what is the extent of managers' knowledge of these algorithms. The algorithms are not gender-neutral as often focused on a male model.

**Luca** responded that he agreed that algorithms are not a marginal issue – particularly on platform work. They respond to the needs of the employers and not in the interest of workers. Trade union representatives need access to algorithms to ensure no bias and the removal of exploitative elements. The right of access to algorithms needs to be clear and enforced. The European Commission and DG Employment are well aware of this and access is included in the EC proposal for a directive on platform work. This may not be achieved as powerful elements oppose it. It is also an issue for countries outside of the EU with some opposition from conservative and neo-liberal politicians. We need a political response.

On the right to disconnect we need to introduce regulations and collective agreements. There are consequences on workers' mental and physical health so health and safety frameworks are fundamental. The ETUC is campaigning with the ITUC and the ILO to recognise OHS as a fundamental human right.

Regarding computers and machines taking control – it is important that all directives dealing with machines take account that humans take control of machines, not the other way round. Machines

may provide actions but control must remain with humans.

And regarding Ulisses' second question – what we need is to know what you are doing on the ground. Most digital work is in the capitals so we need to know what you can do on the ground and what strategies you intend to implement.

Christina thanked Luca and the conference broke for lunch

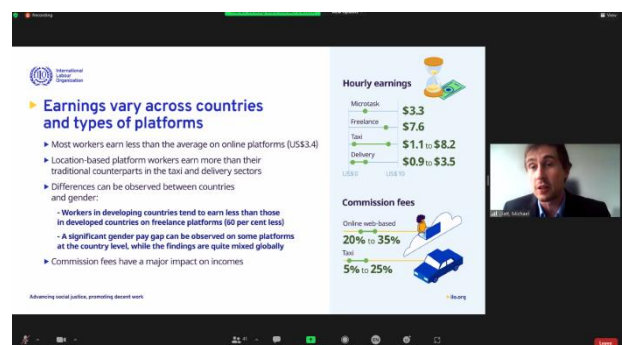
## Tuesday 2pm

The conference will break up into working groups, but first an introduction to the topic, Digitalisation in the capital cities and labour, from **Michael Watt**, the Bureau for Workers' Activities, ILO.



He said that digitalisation has received renewed emphasis, but it's not a new topic. The ILO's publication "World employment and social outlook" focuses on digital labour platforms – particularly around delivery and taxi services. There's been a big surge in online platforms and most workers earn less than the average. Platforms can take up to 25% in fees. There is also a significant gender wages gap and poor social protection coverage as most are not classed as workers but as independent contractors.

Management by algorithms, such as "ratings and reputation" function with no impact from real people, or are based on customer ratings. There are few appropriate dispute mechanisms for workers to challenge outcomes. Working conditions are determined by the platform and not by legal rights. No collective bargaining.



Other impacts of digitalisation on the world of work – such as data protection. Workers are subject to data collection but are also creating



loads of data themselves (through computers, video, phones, wearables, CCTV, facial recognition). This data can be, and is, sold on with no ownership by the worker.

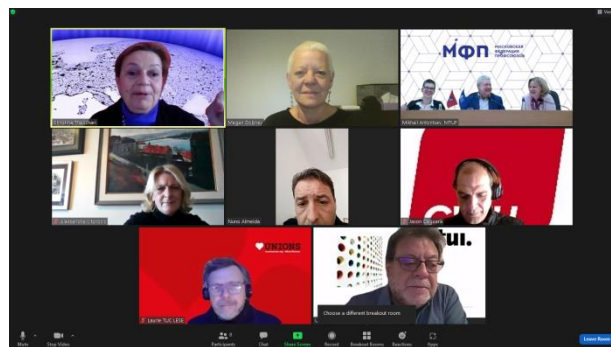
Also algorithmic management. It's an old question but using new technology includes candidate vetting (hiring and firing), word and voice monitoring – including monitoring the tone of voice.

The role of trade unions include classification (employed, contractor) – not a new challenge but unregulated, data protection, organising and representing (including the new challenge of independent unions), and developing new agreements focussing on new technology.

The challenges have not fundamentally changes – we need to find new avenues to organise and represent.



The ILO has been working on digitalisation since its foundation in 1919! There was the “Future of Work” initiative from 2015 with a centenary declaration in 2019. The main points were protection of privacy and personal data, commitment to social dialogue, and the employment relationship. However there is a gap between the tripartite agreement on the declaration and the reality on the ground.



Delegates moved to working groups and each appointed a member to make a brief report back. Key points were:

- The informal economy is moving from offline to online
- Whilst digitalisation is useful it has been used to advantage employers – wages and working hours have been disadvantaged
- Italy has seen some improvement via collective bargaining
- In Belgrade it was not so positive; they have little experience of platform work so this conference is very useful
- A new Mayor in Rome may offer new opportunities for collective bargaining – including on health and safety in construction
- Rome will try and close the digital divide by creating hubs in peripheral areas for platform workers to meet
- Health and safety campaigns like “No death on the job” have been running in Rome as the number of deaths has been rocketing in Rome and Italy – seeking to oppose the lowest bidder tenders
- There are negative impacts in teleworking especially concerning regulations – it is the same problems but in a new form
- Focus is on how to be included and have more impact – including on health
- Employers are often invisible
- Need to fight against an increase in racism and discrimination
- Changes include low quality, poor or no contracts, no social security,

- discrimination, and a flourishing of the informal economy – plus poor connectivity
- Propose an exchange of experiences amongst capitals on how labour law evolves on digitalisation, highlighting areas of discrimination and following how this evolves in the capitals

### Election of the new Permanent Committee

The conference then moved on to the election of the new Permanent Committee. Christina informed delegates that the vote would be secret. Six names have been put forward (two each from the Northern, Southern and Eastern groups). Trade union organisations can vote for any number of colleagues (up to six).

The electronic ballot took place and the results were:

- 13 Laurent Pagnier (Southern)
- 13 Christina Theochari (Southern)
- 12 Yulia Turkina (Central/Eastern)
- 11 Dragan Todorovic (Central/Eastern)
- 10 Sam Gurney (Northern)
- 10 Bianca Kuhl (Southern)

**Mikhail Antontsev** Moscow spoke to thank all members of the previous Permanent Committee, noting that most of the new PC were new members, and to thank Christina particularly for her work as Coordinator.

### Wednesday 26 January 09.30

Christina welcomed **Bela Galgoczi** from the ETUI who introduced the second workshop topic: Sustainable, smart, urban solutions across different sectors in the capital cities.



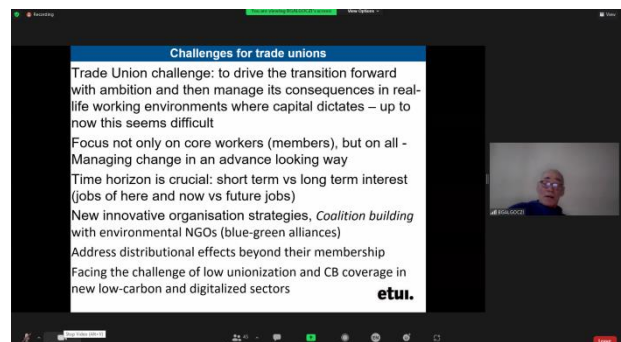
Bela said it is a complicated picture.

Decarbonisation has to be the number one priority – and 19% of emissions are due to road transport, whilst 18% were from coal.

Technology is the main driver of digitalisation – for decarbonisation the main driver is policy (for instance taxation and incentives) that determines viable technological solutions.

The concept of “just” is different for a green transition and a digital transition. Green is focussed on the future with public responsibility, Digital is focussed on taming market forces in the drive for profit.

Social dialogue is necessary at all levels. In a post-Covid-19 world, the changing nature of work has a profound impact on cities – eg. city centres can be deserted.



There are employment changes due to decarbonisation – such as in the auto industry,

that may lose 13.8 million jobs in Europe. There is a shift of value added from engineering to software and data that will lead to job losses in the production process.

This change will lead to new inequalities and trade unions must face the challenge of low carbonisation and collective bargaining coverage in the new low carbon and digitised industries.

The conference broke up into working groups to consider which of their sectors had been most affected and how, and what common action could ECTUN take. A spokesperson from each group then reported back on these points.

- The Maltese government decided that from October all public transport will be free of charge, and support will be given towards hybrid and electric vehicles
- The Maltese government is also seeking EU funds to promote a scheme on Gozo (Maltese island with 30,000 inhabitants) to decarbonise the island
- In London the Mayor has introduced a low emission zone with a proposal to expand it. A road charging scheme is also being considered. However this is not helped by the fact that the city's public transport system receives no public funding and the under-use of public transport during the pandemic has severely affected its finances
- ECTUN should collate and share the different actions from the capitals, along with the trade union responses and their action plans
- We need better communications between us!
- The new Permanent Committee will elaborate a concrete proposal from the discussion.

**Christina Theochari** gave Luca's apologies for the final session – as had been reported he was suffering from Covid-19 and was currently queuing for a test and unable to join us.



**Vera Dos Santos Costa** made her final remarks, responding positively from the report backs from the working groups.

She said there was clearly a major awareness of the concepts and huge concerns about the impact of the changes on employment and doubts about governments' commitments to the re-skilling and up-skilling required.

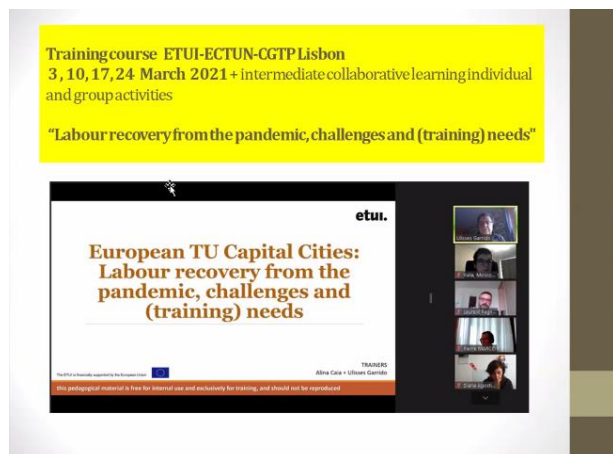
The demands on ECTUN were clearly about the sharing of information and exchange of practices using questionnaires and surveys. We need an ECTUN strategy with the possible drafting of a campaign – all relevant to the network.

The question is: what would be your priority for the year? From that will grow an action plan and we can support that by developing training. We have a training programme on anticipating change – so the new PC will have as its first task defining the priority for the next year. ECTUN can count on the support of ETUI to achieve its goals.

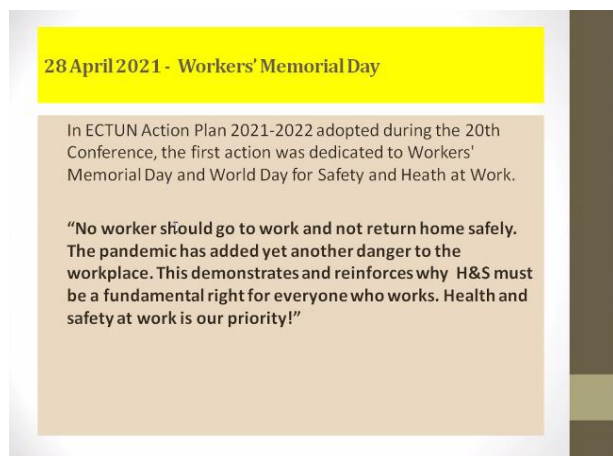
She congratulated the new PC and said it was obvious that this conference was really dynamic and there is a wide commitment to ECTUN and its development. The network is unique and it is the right time to give it more visibility and develop skills – we are on your side and will help you.

**Christina** thanked Vera for her presence and support and summarised by saying that the acceleration of digitalisation has been exacerbated by the pandemic. There are negative and positive aspects – many negatives have been described by speakers during the conference – it is a very dangerous landscape.

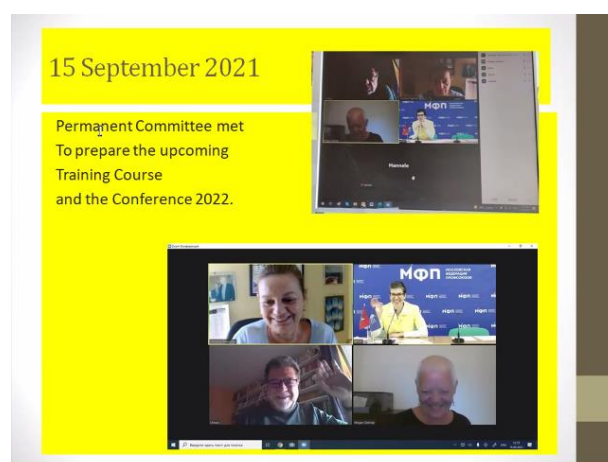
Regarding the smart sustainable cities – trade unions must be in dialogue with municipalities. Our organisations must be more involved in the planning of the smart city. A lot of common actions have been suggested and it is the task of the new PC to elaborate a proposal for the year ahead. We must improve our communications – the network is the members.



She then presented her report of the last year's activities. Apart from the formal meetings of the Permanent Committee and the training conference (all remote) she and other members of the network had participated (again, mostly remotely) in various conferences, solidarity actions and events organised by member trade union bodies.



Joint materials had been produced for May Day and other workers' events and the Facebook page was active. She again commented on the sad death of Franco Fatiga.



### Future conferences

The 2023 conference will be in Belgrade, and the 2024 one will be in Madrid.

### Close of conference

Christina thanked all participants for their attendance, Ulisses Garrido for his support, the colleagues in Belgrade for their collaboration on organising the conference, the interpreters for their work, and hoped to see everyone in person next year.

**Sam Gurney** London and **Veselina Starcheva** Sofia both expressed their thanks to those who were leaving the PC for their work over the past four years, and conference was closed.

Please note:

*This is not a verbatim report. It aims to capture the essential discussion and decisions taken.*

Prepared by Megan Dobney  
February 2022