SPECIAL COMMITTEE FOR THE FUTURE

(Meeting held on August 26, 2021).

THE CHAIR.—A quorum being present, the meeting is called to order.

(The time is 12:14).

—Please report an item of incoming business.

(The following is reported).

"The Directorate-General for Cultural Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs sends an invitation to the 12th session of the Intergovernmental Bioethics Committee (CIGB), to be held online on September 23 and 24, 2021."

—I would like the Committee to address three topics today.

One is more urgent: the Future Day event, which, by law, falls on Monday, September 27. As you will recall, the law established that it be celebrated on the last Monday in September; therefore, we cannot change that date.

Second, I would like to exchange ideas about a proposal for building capabilities for this work in the Special Committee for the Future. At the School of Government, we decided that members of this Committee—also through party allocations, of course—would have priority in enrolling people for that training.

Third, we have a proposal on which I would like at least an initial exchange: the possibility of holding a first meeting of committees for the future in the region; initially, it could be Latin America, where there are some committees for the future. Many members of other parliaments, on learning that we were launching this Committee, proposed that we hold an initial meeting. That would also put us ahead of other international meetings to be held next year. For example, we have an invitation to participate in a first world meeting of committees for the future in Helsinki in the European autumn next year—I think it would be in September. We received the invitation and it said "autumn," so I assume it will be in September or October next year. With this meeting, we would have a preview and

would hold a first meeting of Latin American committees here in Uruguay. This depends on the public health situation, but I think it is a good idea to bring to fruition.

Regarding Future Day, to be celebrated—as I repeat—on September 27, in accordance with the law, that is, the last Monday in September. Before this Committee was set up, the celebration was organized by the presidencies of the Chambers—I think at one point by the presidency of the Chamber of Representatives and at another by the presidency of the General Assembly, continuing a customary practice—and now it would be our turn. In that regard, we informed both the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Chamber of Representatives of our intention to take charge and, of course, to count on their support and whatever participation they wish to have.

With that in mind, we brought a draft to serve as a proposal for commemorating the day. We asked accountant Bruno Gili to help us put it together, considering that he represents Uruguay in a world forum that holds events of this kind every day. Given his experience, we thought it appropriate and useful to ask for his assistance. In short, we have been working on this draft plan, a copy of which we have given to each legislator.

Essentially, it would be a full-day event, beginning at 09:00 and ending at 19:00. We would have one-hour panels; the first would begin at 09:30, the second at 10:30 and the third at 11:45. There would be three panels in the morning and three in the afternoon, addressing the themes of forums of this kind. As you can see in the material provided, the panels would be as follows. First: “Uruguay’s challenges in the face of globalization; the scientific and technological revolution and climate change”; second: “The fourth industrial revolution: the knowledge economy”; third: “Opportunities and risks in the agricultural export industrial chain and potential for developing a life sciences industry in Uruguay”; fourth: “Tensions and trends in globalization. Challenges in terms of sustainability, equity, efficiency and governance”; fifth: “Society and human capital.” We highlighted in red what we thought might be a more appropriate title: “Sociocultural transformations and the challenges they pose for society. Uruguay in action to adapt to a world undergoing profound and rapid change”; and the sixth and final panel would be: “Opportunities and challenges of social and environmental sustainability for Uruguay in a context of worrying climate change and demographic challenges.” We would end with time for final reflections, as a kind of conclusion or a way to draw out the main points from each panel.

These are the areas relating to issues of the future that are being discussed.

We proposed panelists who, as you will see, are as varied and plural as possible in every respect, or at least that is what we tried to achieve. The proposal is also plural and diverse in terms of generations, fields of knowledge, and the public and private sectors. Legislators will see that we included the

Rector of the University, the GACH scientists who have been leading work on the pandemic, and academics and experts who worked on foresight in previous governments, such as Fernando Isabella, who led foresight planning at OPP during the previous five years, and Sebastián Torres, who worked on foresight in agro-industrial chain planning. As you can see, we also included technology entrepreneurs, people from science, the Institut Pasteur and others.

We also suggested that the event be moderated by journalists who are addressing these topics in their programs, meaning they are interested in and knowledgeable about them. We are simply proposing names. We have spoken with them and they have agreed. Of course, this remains subject to the Committee's approval and we are open—as we must be—to including others whom you think could help moderate these panels; nor need it be just one person. For the conclusions, we can also include other journalists whom you think could recap what was discussed.

As you will see, for each panel we prepared a summary of what the topic would be or what it would cover. The panels would last an hour, so panelists would have no more than ten minutes—a very short time—to speak. In other words, the format would be more thought-provoking and geared toward contributing topics to an agenda that we would then have to take up as input for the Committee's work.

Also as a proposal—we will see today whether we can do this or leave it for another occasion—a working lunch would be held with the Committee during the break from 12:45 to 15:00. We would use it for the UNESCO Chair's expert, Lydia Garrido, under the framework agreement we have signed, to explain the methodological proposal the Chair is using for futures. We are talking about a proposal and therefore an opportunity to learn, exchange ideas, ask questions and begin refining and putting things together. We may agree with some parts of the methodological proposal and find others harder to apply or even understand, but we will naturally adapt it to what we consider possible, feasible and appropriate. In short, since it will be a full-day event, we propose a working lunch where UNESCO expert Lydia Garrido can give a presentation and we can exchange views. We think this idea could be useful or appropriate.

We could also take the opportunity to invite other organizations that have expressed interest in participating, such as UNDP, the United Nations Office—which is naturally working on these issues, as it does every year—Ambassador Alejandra De Bellis, who represented Uruguay at UNESCO in Paris until a few weeks ago and is very well versed in these issues, as well as a representative of the IDB or CAF, which are naturally always producing studies of this kind. I repeat that we can invite them and exchange views, or alternatively we can exchange views with Lydia Garrido in a

more internal setting, so to speak. I simply think we could use that time for dialogue.

I would like to know what you think of this proposal. We do not have to finalize it today, but we should have some idea whether this is the direction we are taking.

We can also incorporate each of our contributions into the panels. Personally, I put this outline together because I thought it might be better to listen than to intervene, but the proposal is open. It is quite dense because of the number of topics, but if we had left any out, people would have asked why one was included and another was not. The only one we explicitly left out, and which I would like us to address soon in this Committee, is what has come to be called algorithmic democracy. In a sense, this concerns how all this digitization is affecting democracy, from the choice of topics for public debate to all those areas where large platforms and digitization are undoubtedly having an impact today. These are very recent, very nascent issues, and I think we have to be the first to address them. I also think this subject needs its own dedicated treatment, so we could leave it for that meeting of Latin American committees for the future, where it would be an important issue to discuss, and we could even bring in an expert in the field. Again, it is very recent, but I think it is something we must analyze.

I leave this matter for your consideration.

MR. OLMOS.—I have just been reading the proposal. I think it is a good starting point for a first meeting. I also see that it is organized from the general to the particular, branching out into several areas at the end; so it starts broadly and gradually becomes more focused. I think our participation should perhaps be—and very limited—in the final reflections; two or three of us could speak there. Ultimately, I think it is worth listening, and I agree that the proposal has a good academic and political balance across thematic areas.

In principle, I would move forward with this and authorize the Chair to make whatever adjustments are necessary, since I do not know whether all these people will be able to participate on that date. Perhaps we need some flexibility in that regard.

(Expressions of support).

THE CHAIR.—We welcome those joining us via Zoom: legislators Melazzi and Valdomir and legislator Rodríguez.

MR. VALDOMIR.—Greetings to my colleagues on the Committee.

Congratulations on this initial outline you are presenting for September 27.

Along the lines of what legislator Olmos was saying, my suggestion is that the synthesis should come from the political sphere, as the closing of the day. If no more than one or two people can take part, we think it is appropriate for you, as Committee Chair, and the Vice Chair to provide the closing or synthesis of a day that, as we see, is very full and substantial. I think we, as politicians, have to take up the challenge, so to speak, of producing the overall synthesis of a very long day rich in different approaches.

Second, understanding that this is a working draft—which, in 90% or 95% of its content, seems quite broad-ranging and very balanced to us—we suggest that the day's last panel, which is very comprehensive because it covers not only climate change but also demographic challenges, should ideally include another demographer's perspective. I would venture to suggest economist Juan José Calvo, who specializes in economic demography, has been a United Nations representative on population matters in the region, and wrote on Uruguay's demographic scenarios for 2050 in a 2011 study also supported by the United Nations. That study sets out several scenarios for Uruguay's population pyramid under different assumptions—birth rates, death rates, and so on—again, in 2050. I think he is one of the most knowledgeable people on demographic structure, so he could be a good name to include on the last panel, if he is here.

Clearly, names can later be added or changed depending on panelists' availability, because we know they have busy schedules and it may be difficult for them to be there on September 27. But as a starting point, this is a good draft and a good proposal.

We leave those two ideas for Committee members to consider.

THE CHAIR.—I think both of the legislator's comments are very good.

I agree that several members should take part in the final segment; we have to see how many we can include, certainly more than one, perhaps up to three. Since everyone will have to be brief, we should be too, because the preceding panelists will have a maximum of ten minutes. I think inviting economist Juan José Calvo is a very good idea. I do not know whether he is in Uruguay, but if he is not, we could arrange for him to participate via Zoom. We will try to have him attend in person, but the exception proves the rule, so I think this is good and will make a note of it. If anyone has direct contact with or access to the economist, I would appreciate it; otherwise, we will handle it ourselves.

MR. CAL.—I do not know whether the proposal is yours, Mr. Chair, but I congratulate you on the idea because I think it is a very good beginning for this Committee: it sets out the main points we all expect from the Special Committee for the Future, or at least what I expect.

I join in the two suggestions made by legislators Valdomir and Olmos. First, I think it is right to keep this list open in case another speaker can be added.

Second, I believe the ideal would be for members of this Committee to deliver the closing, led by you as Chair.

Thank you very much.

MS. MATO.—I appreciate the work that has been done; the Chair has surely played a major role in it.

I will make a few comments on the speakers, although I must acknowledge that I do not know all the names—we have only just received them. But I see that our colleagues from the Frente Amplio parliamentary group already know who they are, because they have made suggestions, as legislator Valdomir has done.

In my view, particularly in the first presentation, I think that in both the present and the future we must take account of the topics and the people presenting them; that is, women must be present. I say this because, specifically in this case, all the speakers are men, with one woman moderator, and moderating is not the same as taking the floor. There are some similar situations elsewhere, but at the outset I think this issue should be taken into account; it is not a minor one.

I also think the idea of a working lunch during the break is important, so that we too can exchange views. I think working with Lydia Garrido is very good, and perhaps with some others, such as those you mentioned. In any case, we should limit the number of guests and try not to have too many people, so that the exchange is fruitful rather than creating a problem because of the number present and preventing us from making the most of it. I think it is good to have a day of listening and also of thinking, with that exchange taking place during the break.

I also agree with changing the title “Society and human capital” to “Sociocultural transformations and the challenges they pose for society,” which is much better. I do not think society and human capital speak to the future; it would be like remaining stuck in time. So I think the name change is right.

Regarding the final reflections, I fully agree with legislator Valdomir that the reflection must undoubtedly be political. Obviously, after this whole day, each of us must produce a synthesis. I think the names proposed by legislator Valdomir—the Committee Chair and Vice Chair—are appropriate.

THE CHAIR.—I think that is right. We will include women on the panels because, as the legislator says, the first panel ended up with only men. We will work along those lines.

As for the working lunch, I agree with limiting participation to give us more opportunity to understand the proposal, ask all our questions about the proposed methodology, and see how we can also adapt it to our circumstances. Perhaps there could be an extra person; I gave Ambassador De Bellis as an example because she represented us on this issue at UNESCO in Paris for at least the past five years and is very well versed in it, so she could also help us. I think the current ambassador is Gabriela Civila, who replaced her, and it is much better for the ambassador to do it directly than for us to do it ourselves. So perhaps we could include her, as she is very interested in these subjects. In fact, she was the one who sent us the invitation you will have seen to the Ibero-American Bioethics Day, and perhaps she could join us that day, but not many more people. The idea is to work, and if it takes an hour or a little longer, we can manage that; we would not invite anyone else except someone we think could help us with this subject.

MR. CARBALLO.—Regarding the first item on the agenda, I think the proposal we are receiving today is a good initiative, because ultimately it sets out the direction some of these topics should take.

Personally, I would like to focus on work-related topics, because these are not reflected in the main headings, although they do appear in the 16:00–17:00 workshop, where work and employment for Uruguayan citizens are mentioned at the end of the description. I think this is one of the central issues, and we should find a way to give it a little more prominence. Although I do not know all the panelists, I assume you have already contacted them or confirmed their attendance.

THE CHAIR.—That is absolutely right. Sometimes I take some things for granted, but we must remember that this is the first meeting. As you will recall, we initially announced that in the Committee's first year we would focus on the future of work or the work of the future. That is why I did not want to place much emphasis on it here, and I did not include any experts in this event from among those who will probably work with us during the year. That was the reason, and the deputy is quite right to say that a key issue lacks emphasis. As I said, I played it down because we will be working on it throughout the year. At the same time, I did not want to "use up," in quotation marks, people at this event who will be working with us, also because of issues of prominence and sensitivities. In any event, if deputy Carballo thinks it would be better to give it more emphasis, we will do so.

MR. CARBALLO.—I simply wanted to place this particular point on the record.

I would now like to refer to another matter, but in this case I would ask that it not be recorded verbatim.

(The verbatim recording is temporarily suspended).

THE CHAIR.—We can continue developing this draft framework plan, incorporating some of the adjustments proposed at this meeting. Of course, we still have time to invite whatever panelists we consider appropriate.

Naturally, we should already begin the organizational work to prepare for that day. The event would take place in the Senate Antechamber, with lunch elsewhere, perhaps in a large room such as the Events Room in the Salón de los Pasos Perdidos or the Pasaje Acuña de Figueroa arranged for work of this kind.

If you agree, we should hold a special Committee meeting before September 27 to make the final adjustments. We are currently convening the Committee on the last Thursday of each month, but this time we should schedule a meeting in the week before the 27th, on Tuesday the 21st or Thursday the 23rd, which are the least difficult days for Committee members. Personally, I think it is best to vote on it in the WhatsApp group; the idea is for those of us who can meet to do so on Tuesday the 21st or Thursday the 23rd to finalize the organizational details.

MR. CAL.—Some members have already expressed their views in the group and individually, so I would like to note that Tuesday would personally suit me better. I do not know whether the idea is to establish the Committee's working arrangements, but if another day is better for most members, I will adapt.

THE CHAIR.—In principle, we will schedule that extraordinary meeting for Tuesday the 21st at 12:00. I think it is better to have more days in case any adjustments are needed; this way, we would have a week.

Regarding the other two points, we do not have to decide them; I simply wanted to share the information. You have already received the proposal—and we will now send it to those connected via Zoom—which has already been agreed and defined by the School of Government and offers training on futures. It is quite demanding, very high-quality training, essentially concerning the methodologies now available for anticipation and learning about everything committees for the future around the world are doing. There will even be some virtual contributions from experts working on these issues who can review the topics, how deeply they are being explored and how far the studies have gone. It is a very, very good proposal financed by the School of Government. What we decided was that members of this Committee would have priority. So the idea is to begin in the first week of October, with the same membership allocation we have here. There is a kind of standard allocation by party and faction, and we would take the places first. Initially, there is a maximum of twenty, which we could stretch a little, but the fifteen members here would have priority.

The course really is very, very good. It is demanding, but anyone who takes it comes away knowing what we are talking about. So you can look it over.

There is also already a proposal for some fourteen sessions, which I will send you because I do not have the copies now. Since we have some flexibility, we could start in the first or second week of October; we have time to think it over.

The other topic, which I think is a good idea, is something we can continue considering. We would be the first to hold a meeting with Latin American committees for the future. Perhaps later someone from Europe would also wish to join as a guest, but it would be the first meeting of this kind. We would be looking at mid-November, and it need not be very formal. We would need to start making inquiries. There are very few established committees for the future, but several are being formed. We could also send an open invitation to each Parliament for one day or a day and a half of work.

MR. CARBALLO.—As I was saying a moment ago, I agree with both of these topics in particular. I think the courses and the School of Government initiative will be good. It is interesting to gain a better understanding of the topics we will address and to have a criterion for giving priority to Committee members. I think that is right.

I also agree that an activity of this kind could take place in November. It is true that some committees have been working for some time and are therefore months or years ahead of us. I think it would be good to have that accumulated knowledge in our country, and that the rich exchange among legislators would be very interesting. It would also be valuable for parliaments forming committees of this kind. I agree with the approach and welcome the creation of a forum for meeting with these characteristics.

MR. OLMOS.—I agree with holding it, but I would point out that we should decide now, because if we leave it until late September, when we hold the meeting, we will already be in October and will not have time to do anything in November. Organizing something like this, however small, takes work. The guests will also have to save the date. So I would favor approving the idea, authorizing the Chair to consult Committee members, and moving ahead with implementation. Otherwise, I do not think we will be ready in time.

THE CHAIR.—On the basis of legislator Olmos's proposal and with the consent of the other Committee members, we would be approving the event, naturally subject to the public health situation, since meeting in person would be very important for exchanging ideas freely.

(Expressions of support).

—The Chair is therefore tasked with advancing the organizational work and setting the date. In principle, it would last a day and a half, beginning in the afternoon and finishing the next day. Committee members will be kept informed of progress on the event.

MS. RODRÍGUEZ.—I fully agree with what the previous speakers have said.

I want to congratulate you on the work done and on the program, which has been very well prepared.

I agree that the closing should be political and handled by the Chair and Vice Chair—that would be ideal—while also leaving open the possibility of adding some points with the prior agreement of Committee members.

The panel scheduled from 16:00 to 17:00 on “Society and human capital” is extremely profound. I do not have any names to propose at the moment, but I do think someone with a stronger human rights perspective could be added, because the changes in our societies’ dynamics are an extremely profound issue and we are all engaged and committed in that regard.

I should clarify that I have only just seen the material. I propose that we continue moving forward, and most likely later we will be able to put forward a name on which there can be agreement.

Overall, I fully agree with what has been proposed and congratulate the Chair on the work done.

THE CHAIR.—I think it is right to give that panel a human rights perspective and look for a woman panelist who identifies with the subject. Of course, the list remains open, but I will also take on the task.

The meeting is adjourned.

(The time is 13:08).