

OUR VISION OF THE CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

A citizens' process to shape our future

After months of negotiations, an agreement was eventually found between the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council to start the Conference on the Future of Europe.

We welcome this long-awaited outcome and are now putting all our efforts in making the Conference a successful democratic process that delivers change and drives Europe closer to its citizens.

The Covid-19 crisis has shown us, probably more than ever, how much a democratic, strong and social European Union is needed and how much it needs fundamental reforms to be fully functioning. It has shown what being together as Europeans in a political community means, how vital this is. It has shown that European solidarity is not an abstract concept.

However, it has also demonstrated, at a very high cost, that the EU remains an unfinished project, that its slowness to organize solidarity, its national vetoes, its lack of competences in some fundamental areas are not theoretical debates, but very concrete realities that can save lives.

The surge in participation in the last European elections confirmed citizens' expectations towards the Union and interest in being an active part of the process.

In this framework, the Conference on the Future of Europe is a unique opportunity for us to learn from the mistakes of the past and build a Union fit for the future and for its common challenges.

The joint declaration signed by the three institutions on March 10th leaves a lot of questions unanswered.

These points are not technical details; there are fundamental aspects of the project that will determine its success.

● **Impactful citizens' participation at the centre of the process**

We welcome the decision of setting up **representative European citizen's panels**, a model that we have been advocating for from the beginning. Random selection from among all EU citizens provides the inclusion also of those who are usually missed by all other methods of citizen participation.

Experience shows, notably in France and in Ireland that panels where citizens work together to make recommendations on key debates works; it produces meaningful

policy proposals, raises public awareness on the topic discussed and strengthens the vitality of the democratic debate.

To be successful, **these panels need to have a clear mandate and be given enough time to work**. Each panel should meet enough days to have time for deliberation, not just brainstorming, be moderated by experienced neutral facilitators and get preparatory training. Their recommendations should then be discussed in the Conference Plenary and lead to concrete proposals, including treaty change if appropriate.

A feedback mechanism should ensure that citizens present their recommendations to the Conference Plenary, discuss them and publicly give their opinions on the proposed follow-up.

We also believe that the three presidents of the Conference should present the draft Plenary recommendations to the European citizen panels before their adoption. When it comes to the topics, they should be determined after a listening phase where citizens have the opportunity to say what priority topics matter to them.

Without pre-empting the result of this listening phase, we believe that environmental challenges and climate change, democratic reforms and the protection of fundamental freedoms and rights including women, LGBTI* and marginalised groups' rights, social justice, economic issues including taxation and digital transformation, migration, trade and the role of the EU in the world are key topics that should be part of the debate.

We also advocate for the **involvement of non EU citizens who share a common destiny with EU citizens**, like it is the case for citizens from candidate countries, EEA countries or the UK.

● For an inclusive Conference Plenary

Ownership of the participatory process all over Europe is key and the right balance between European, national and regional perspective will determine the success of the exercise.

For this reason, we believe that the Conference plenary should include an **equal number of MEPs and of representatives of Member States where at least four Members of Parliament per Member State** should be involved, in order to allow for a diverse political representation, **reflecting election results on the different levels, to not exclude any European party family**.

Representatives of the European civil society, the Committee of the Regions, the Economic and Social Committee and Social partners should also be represented.

The work of the plenary should be organized in thematic committees reflecting the citizens' assemblies and its mandate should have as central element to discuss citizens' recommendations and transform them into concrete proposals for policy or other change, including treaty change. At the same time, parliamentarians, government members and Commissioners must be free and encouraged to develop their own ideas on the future of Europe.

When taking decisions at plenary levels, a **majority overall and in each of the different pillars** (European Parliament, National Parliaments and governments, European Commission) should be found.

● **Putting democracy in the hands of citizens**

If we are serious about discussing the Future of Europe, about giving citizens' a say in shaping it, **we have to be ready for the Future they want to be different from the one we live in today.**

Many EU policies, like tax policies, social policies, anti-discrimination policies are failing because of a lack of competence at EU level or because of national vetoes.

The way we take decisions, what competence we want to attribute to which levels are crucial questions that citizens should have the right to debate and work on during the Conference.

Citizens should also have the possibility to discuss how their representatives in the European Parliament are elected, how the President of the European Commission is elected. These are basic and core parts of European democracy and deserve an open debate.

● **A Conference that delivers change**

All this exercise only makes sense if citizens and beyond them, all the actors involved in the process, have the assurance that they are not working for nothing. **Making sure that what will be agreed during the Conference will be followed-up by the EU institutions, either by legislative proposals, Treaty changes or otherwise is a *sine qua non* condition for this process to be a success.**

The Joint declaration foresees that *"the three institutions will examine swiftly how to follow up effectively to this report, each within their own sphere of competences and in accordance with the Treaties."*

We strongly believe that this commitment must lead to real changes, based on the inputs of citizens, and we will put all our energy in preventing a disappointing process that could only raise frustration and mistrust.

We also commit to follow-up on the citizens' recommendation everywhere we have the power to do so, being at local, regional, national or European level.

Developing an ambitious vision for the future needs time. Substantial changes, including constitutional changes, should be thoroughly examined and discussed. Limiting the conference to a 12 month process would ensure that it cannot succeed. The conference should be allowed to take the necessary time to deliver results, while ensuring that **there are concrete outcomes well ahead of the next European elections in 2024.**



Our political family will invest this unique opportunity to bring citizens together and shape our common future towards a more democratic, more efficient, fairer and greener Europe.

Because we need robust and long-term proposals to fight against climate change, to protect biodiversity, to build a new agricultural and energy system and organize the transition of our society towards a green future.

Because we need to build a feminist, inclusive and anti-racist Europe, with reforms to protect fundamental rights and freedoms, equal rights for all and to fight against all types of discrimination in all areas.

Because we need to create a social Europe where all Europeans have access to public services, including health care and social protection and where no one is left behind.

Because we need to build a truly democratic Union, to rebalance the division of competences, to put an end to national vetoes, to make our decision-making procedure more efficient and transparent, to make the European elections really European and to uphold citizens' rights in the EU.