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From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations
Subject: Conference on the Future of Europe
- Joint Declaration

Delegations will find attached the Joint Declaration on the Conference on the Future of Europe as approved by the Council on 5 March 2021 through written procedure.

JOINT DECLARATION ON THE CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

ENGAGING WITH CITIZENS FOR DEMOCRACY– Building a more resilient Europe

70 years ago, the Schuman declaration laid the foundations of our European Union. It started a unique political project that brought peace and prosperity, improving the lives of all European citizens. It is now appropriate to reflect on our Union, the challenges we are facing and the future we want to build together with the objective of strengthening European solidarity.

Since its creation, the European Union has mastered multiple challenges. With the COVID19 pandemic, the European Union's unique model was challenged like never before. Europe can and must also learn the lessons from these crises, closely involving citizens and communities.

The European Union has to show that it can provide answers to citizens' concerns and ambitions. European policy must provide inclusive answers to our generation-defining tasks: achieving the green and digital transition, while strengthening Europe's resilience, its social contract and European industry's competitiveness. It must address inequalities and ensure the European Union is a fair, sustainable, innovative and competitive economy that leaves no one behind. To address geopolitical challenges in the post COVID-19 global environment, Europe needs to be more assertive, taking a leading global role in promoting its values and standards in a world increasingly in turmoil.

The increase in voter turnout during the 2019 European election reflects the growing interest of European citizens in playing a more active role in deciding the future of the Union and its policies.

The Conference on the Future of Europe will open a new space for debate with citizens to address Europe's challenges and priorities. European citizens from all walks of life and corners of the Union will be able to participate, with young Europeans playing a central role in shaping the future of the European project.

We, the Presidents of the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission want citizens to join the conversation and have their say on the future of Europe. We hereby jointly commit to listen to Europeans and to follow up on the recommendations made by Conference, in full respect of our competences and the subsidiarity and proportionality principles enshrined in the European Treaties. We will seize the opportunity to underpin the democratic legitimacy and functioning of the European project as well as to uphold the EU citizens support for our common goals and values, by giving them further opportunities to express themselves.

The Conference is a joint undertaking of the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission, acting as equal partners together with the Member States of the European Union. As signatories of this Joint Declaration, we commit to working together throughout the Conference and to dedicating the necessary resources to this endeavour. We commit to working in the interest of Europe, our citizens, and European democracy, strengthening the link between Europeans and the institutions that serve them.

Under the umbrella of the Conference and in full respect of the principles set out in this Joint Declaration, we will organise events in partnership with civil society and stakeholders at European, national, regional and local level, with national and regional Parliaments, the Committee of the Regions, the Economic and Social Committee, social partners and academia. Their involvement will ensure that the Conference goes far beyond Europe's capital cities and reaches every corner of the Union. Events will be organised under a set of common principles to be agreed by the structures of the Conference.

We invite other institutions and bodies to join in this European democratic exercise. All together, we will make this Conference a success. We will invite the Conference to reach conclusions by Spring 2022 so as to provide guidance on the future of Europe.

a. How

The Conference on the Future of Europe is a **citizens-focused, bottom-up exercise** for Europeans to have their say on what they expect from the European Union. It will give citizens a greater role in shaping the Union's future policies and ambitions, improving its resilience. It will do so through a **multitude** of Conference-events and debates organised across the Union, as well as through an **interactive multilingual digital platform**.

Such Conference events, physical gatherings or in digital settings, can be organised at different levels, including **European, national, transnational** and **regional level** and will involve **civil society and stakeholders**. Citizens' participation in these events should aim at mirroring Europe's diversity.

While, in light of social distancing measures and similar restrictions in the context of **COVID-19**, the use of digital engagement efforts and activities are of key importance, physical participation and face-to-face exchanges should constitute an essential part of the Conference.

At the European level, the European institutions commit to organise **European citizens' panels**.

These should be representative in terms of citizens' geographic origin, gender, age, socioeconomic background and/or level of education. Specific events should be dedicated to young people as their participation is essential for ensuring a long-lasting impact of the Conference. The panels should take on board contributions gathered in the framework of the Conference providing input to the Conference Plenary by formulating a set of recommendations for the Union to follow-up on.

Each Member State and institution can organise additional events, in line with their own national or institutional specificities, and make further contributions to the Conference, such as **national citizens' panels** or thematic events bringing together input from different panels.

National and European events in the framework of the Conference will be organised along a set of principles and minimum criteria reflecting EU values to be defined by the Conference structures.

The European institutions will also **reach out** to citizens and promote broader, interactive and creative forms of participation.

Input from all Conference-related events will be collected, analysed, monitored and published throughout the Conference via a **multilingual digital platform**. This will be a place for citizens to share their ideas and send online submissions.

A **feedback mechanism** will ensure that the ideas expressed during the Conference events result in concrete recommendations for EU action.

The **Conference** will be placed under the authority of the three institutions, represented by the President of the European Parliament, the President of the Council and the President of the European Commission, acting as its **Joint Presidency**.

A lean **governance structure** will help steer the Conference. It will ensure an equal representation of the three European institutions and will be gender-balanced, among all its component parts.

An **Executive Board** will be set up. It will consist of an equal representation from the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission, each having three representatives and up to four observers. The presidential Troika of COSAC will participate as observer. The Committee of the Regions and the Economic and Social Committee, may also be invited as observers, as well as representatives of other EU bodies and social partners where appropriate.

The Executive Board will be co-chaired by the three institutions and will report on a regular basis to the Joint Presidency. The Executive Board will be responsible for taking decisions by consensus, regarding the works of the Conference, its processes and events, overseeing the Conference as it progresses, and preparing the meetings of the Conference Plenary, including citizens' input and their follow up.

A **Common Secretariat**, of limited size and ensuring equal representation of the three institutions, will assist the work of the Executive Board.

A **Conference Plenary** will ensure that the recommendations from the national and European citizens' panels, grouped by themes, are debated without a predetermined outcome and without limiting the scope to pre-defined policy areas. The Conference Plenary will meet at least every six months and be composed of representatives from the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission, as well as representatives from all national Parliaments, on an equal footing and citizens. The Committee of the Regions and the Economic and Social Committee, the social partners, and civil society will also be represented. The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy will be associated when the international role of the EU is discussed. Representatives of key stakeholders may be invited. The Executive Board will draw and publish the conclusions of the Conference Plenary.

The structures of the Conference will agree from the outset and on a consensual basis on the modalities for reporting on the outcomes of the various activities undertaken in the context of the Conference. The final outcome of the Conference will be presented in a report to the Joint Presidency. 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.

b. What

We, the Presidents of the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission, aim to give citizens **a say on what matters to them**.

Reflecting the Strategic Agenda of the European Council, the 2019-2024 Political Guidelines of the European Commission and the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, discussions will cover, amongst others:

Building a healthy continent, the fight against climate change and environmental challenges, an economy that works for people, social fairness, equality and intergenerational solidarity, Europe’s digital transformation, European rights and values including the Rule of Law, migration challenges, security, the EU’s role in the world, the Union’s democratic foundations, and how to strengthen democratic processes governing the European Union. Discussions can also cover cross-cutting issues related to the EU’s ability to deliver on policy priorities, such as better regulation, application of subsidiarity and proportionality, implementation and enforcement of the *acquis* and transparency.

The scope of the Conference should reflect the areas where the European Union has the competence to act or where European Union action would have been to the benefit of European citizens.

Citizens remain free to raise additional issues that matter to them.

c. The principles of the Conference

The Conference is based on **inclusiveness, openness and transparency**, while respecting the privacy of people as well as EU data protection rules. The European Citizens’ panels organised at European level are broadcasted, and online submissions as well as documentation are made available on the platform.

The Conference, its governance and events organised in its framework, are also based on the **values of the EU** as enshrined in the EU Treaties and the European Charter of Fundamental Rights.

The Conference is recognisable through a **single identity** and a **Conference Charter** that all organisers of events have to subscribe to.

For the European Parliament

For the Council

For the European Commission

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