



Council of the
European Union

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NOTE

From: Presidency

To: Permanent Representatives Committee

Subject: Conference on the Future of Europe

Delegations will find attached the Council position as agreed at the Permanent Representative Committee on 24 June 2020.

CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE: COUNCIL POSITION

The European Council discussed the idea of a Conference on the Future of Europe starting in 2020 and ending in 2022 at its meeting held on 12 December 2019. Based on the European Council conclusions and the exchange of views held so far between the Member States and on their individual and joint contributions, as well as taking into account recent developments in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Council sets out the following position with a view to engaging with the European Parliament and the Commission.

A. AIM, CONTENT AND SCOPE OF THE CONFERENCE

1. Building on existing experiences and frameworks, the Conference on the Future of Europe should be seen as an inclusive platform bringing together different voices engaging in a wide reflection and debate on the challenges Europe is facing and on its long-term future. It is an 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.
2. Reflecting on the challenges the EU is facing and on its future has become all the more important following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The latter constitutes an unprecedented challenge for Europe and the whole world, from which we have to draw lessons and continue reflecting on the resilience of our societies and economies. The Conference on the Future of Europe will be an opportunity to engage with citizens and other stakeholders as the EU seeks to emerge stronger from the COVID-19 crisis, as well as to assess the EU's response to the crisis and address the citizens' concerns in this regard with the aim of strengthening European solidarity.

3. In line with the guidance of the European Council, the institutions should give priority to implementing the EU Strategic Agenda agreed in June 2019, and to delivering concrete results for the benefit of our citizens, also bearing in mind that the citizens dialogues and consultations already fed into the Strategic Agenda, which largely reflects their outcome. The Conference should also apply the "policy first" approach and provide inspiration for further development of our policies and instruments in the medium and long term so that we can better tackle current and future challenges (i.e. a vision of Europe in 10 to 20 years). The Union framework offers potential to allow challenges to be addressed in an effective manner.
4. The Conference should focus on topics that truly matter to our citizens, with long lasting impacts and wide outreach. In today's world full of challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the expectations of our citizens are high and they deserve to be comprehensively addressed at EU level, contributing to a joint vision of the direction the EU should take in the next decade and beyond. Effective communication efforts will be essential in this regard. The Council welcomes the Commission's readiness to contribute to these efforts with various existing outreach tools.
5. In order to make the discussions relevant to citizens, the content of the Conference should be centred around several key topics, including those from the EU Strategic Agenda, which are wide enough to provide sufficient space for all participants to express their views and the relevance of which has been further highlighted in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the challenges of the economic recovery, such as:
 - sustainability, including green and just transition and climate neutrality by 2050 (climate change and environmental protection; sustainable and inclusive growth; cohesion, convergence and regional development; equality and social justice);
 - societal challenges (public health; demographic challenges; generational, territorial and educational divides and inequalities; equality between women and men; adequate social protection and inclusive labour markets; comprehensive approach to migration challenges);

- innovation, competitiveness and digital transformation (fair competition; skills and future of work; research and development);
- fundamental values, rights and freedoms (democracy; equality; the rule of law; pluralism; freedom of expression; countering disinformation and strengthening trust in public institutions; inclusiveness; the role of education and culture);
- international role of the EU (addressing geopolitical challenges in the post COVID-19 global environment; interests and values; strategic autonomy; multilateralism and cooperation; security and defence; trade and value chains; border protection; the EU's external action).

In what will be a broad and open-ended process, other topics may be raised if deemed relevant for the future of Europe.

To ensure that optimal results are achieved, it is important to focus also on 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*; transparency).

B. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

6. As the European Council underlined in its December 2019 conclusions, the process needs to be inclusive, with all Member States involved equally. There should be shared ownership by EU institutions and Member States, including their parliaments. Throughout the process and at all levels a large variety of different views and opinions - of EU institutions, Member States' governments, national parliaments, citizens, civil society, academia, social partners and other stakeholders should be taken into account.
7. The Conference should build on the successful holding of citizens' dialogues and consultations over the past two years and foresee a broad debate with citizens in the course of the process. It needs to involve the Council, the European Parliament and the Commission, in full respect of the interinstitutional balance and their respective roles as defined in the Treaties.

8. Our message of the vital role of our citizens and their active participation and contribution in framing our joint vision of Europe's future needs to be clear and strong, and is of utmost importance.

C. ORGANISATION AND FUNCTIONING OF THE CONFERENCE

9. The organisation of the Conference should be based on several key principles: 1) equality between the institutions at all levels, 2) respect for each institution's prerogatives, 3) effectiveness and avoidance of unnecessary bureaucracy; 4) effective involvement of citizens.
10. Participation should include MEPs, Member States' and Commission representatives, national parliaments, as well as the Committee of the Regions (CoR) and the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy should be associated when the international role of the EU is discussed. The involvement of citizens and civil society in various fora needs to ensure a wide representation of different groups in our society, and especially of young people.
11. Governance of the Conference should be lean and streamlined and should respect the main guiding principles listed above, while also taking into account the principle of subsidiarity. The Council, the Commission and the EP should participate on an equal footing in the structures of the Conference, also ensuring gender equality. National parliaments should be closely associated.
12. The Council considers that the Conference could be placed under the authority of an eminent European personality as its independent and single chair; this personality should be able to represent the joint interests of the three EU institutions and be selected by mutual agreement among them. There should also be a steering group composed of representatives of each institution on an equal footing, as well as the current and incoming COSAC rotating presidencies. Representatives of other bodies or groups participating in the Conference (notably CoR/EESC) may be invited by the steering group as observers, where appropriate. The Council will be represented by the Member

States holding the rotating Presidency during the period covered by the work of the Conference¹.

13. A joint secretariat of limited size, with personnel from the EP, Commission and the General Secretariat of the Council could be envisaged, ensuring equality in numbers.
14. Building on the methods and results of the citizens' dialogues and consultations, the Conference, with the assistance in particular of the Commission, the CoR and EESC as well as national parliaments should ensure effective involvement of citizens and stakeholders through debates, including at national and regional level, and through multilingual internet/digital platform(s) and citizens' panels in Member States and at European level.
15. The use of multilingual online platforms and other digital engagement efforts and activities would be of key importance, especially if at the start or during the Conference social distancing measures and similar restrictions in the context of COVID-19 remain in place. Physical participation and face-to-face exchanges should remain essential part of the Conference, with due respect for necessary precautions.
16. In this context, activities could include: (i) main conferences/events (kick-off, mid-term and final) in Brussels/Strasbourg and in the countries of the successive Council Presidencies; (ii) specific thematic conferences/events in Member States, to be organised together with the host Member State or region. Participation in all conferences/events should be open to representatives of all Member States, national parliaments, the EP and the Commission, as well as representatives of the CoR and EESC, aiming for a balance in representation. The participation of representatives from civil society and citizens should be actively sought and facilitated. Each Member State and institution can organise events, in line with their own national or institutional specificities when deciding on the format(s) of events, and make contributions to the Conference. 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.

¹ The Council Presidencies will act upon a mandate from the Council.

17. The Conference should be launched as soon as the conditions allow in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic.
18. The mandate for the Conference should take the form of a Joint Declaration by the Council, the EP and the Commission, reflecting shared views on content and process.

D. OUTCOMES

19. The outcome of the Conference should be reflected in a report to the European Council in 2022.
20. In light of the conclusions of the European Council, the EU institutions would commit to examine swiftly how to follow up effectively to this report, each within their own sphere of competence and in accordance with the Treaties.
21. The Conference does not fall within the scope of Article 48 TEU.
