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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT, THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE
REGIONS**

**CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE
Putting Vision into Concrete Action**

“For Europe, the memory of our past has always framed our future. And that is all the more important at a time when the unthinkable has returned to our continent. Russia's flagrant attempts to redraw maps and rewrite even the most tragic parts of our history have reminded us of the dangers of losing our grip on both our past and our future. Of living in a perpetual present and thinking that things can never be different. That there cannot be better ways of doing things. And even worse: That things will always stay the same if only we do not change. That is so wrong! Standing still is falling back.”

*President von der Leyen,
9 May 2022, Conference on the Future of Europe closing ceremony*

1. INTRODUCTION

It has long been said that the European Union moves faster and further when it has to. The oft-quoted line of Jean Monnet that the Union will be “forged in crises and will be the sum of the solutions adopted for those crises” has rung true for much of the EU’s history – not least in the last two years as we have collectively faced up to a global pandemic and a brutal war of aggression on our doorstep. At the same time, there have been growing calls by European citizens for change and reform, and to work on improving Europe on their own terms. This is why President von der Leyen called for a Conference on the Future of Europe in her Political Guidelines of July 2019, as part of a vision for a new push for European democracy – and committed to following up on its results.

The Conference on the Future of Europe, which kicked off on Europe Day 2021 and ran for one year, was an unprecedented pan-European exercise in deliberative democracy – the largest and broadest of its kind ever seen. It connected people of all ages, countries and backgrounds, many of whom had never engaged with Europe or had not been familiar with the European Union’s institutional make-up. They all brought their different stories and perspectives, their different languages and identities to set out their expectations of Europe and to weave together a vision of its future.

In doing so, the Conference and its participants reflected both the value and the need to better involve citizens in shaping the policies that affect their lives. It breathed new life into the way Europe’s layered democracy works and showed the potential of a real European public space for people across the Union to engage on what matters most to them.

This was exemplified by the way citizens and institutions, lawmakers and laypersons debated the fundamental issues of our time and proposed a number of solutions in areas that will define the future of Europe: from climate change and the environment, to digitalisation and democracy, health and social justice and equality, economy and security, values and culture – and much more besides. Inevitably, the outcome was also shaped by today’s context and in particular the collision of crises which Europe has had to face in the last two years. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our health and economies was reflected in all topics, while Russia’s unprovoked and unjustified war on Ukraine gave poignant emphasis to the need for a stronger Europe in the world, ready to uphold peace and values as it has for more than 70 years.

While the Conference has delivered in both quantity and quality of proposals, its success will ultimately hinge on the change that it can deliver. In this spirit, the European Commission, along with both the European Parliament and Council, all committed in the Joint Declaration of March 2021 to following up on what was proposed – each within the framework of their competences and in accordance with the Treaties. President von der Leyen repeated this commitment at the Conference closing ceremony on 9 May 2022.

This Communication is the first step in doing so. It offers an assessment of what is needed to follow up to the Conference's proposals, gives an overview of the next steps and sets out how best to learn the lessons for the Conference and embed participative democracy into the EU's policy and law making.

2. THE FOLLOW UP: FROM PROPOSALS TO ACTION

The Conference proposals, set out in the final report handed over to the Presidents of the European Parliament, Council and European Commission are wide-ranging, ambitious and forward-looking. They are structured around nine broad themes, with natural overlaps between some of the measures proposed.

The Conference: many proposals, one vision

Throughout a year of events, citizens' panel discussions and ideas collected online crystallised into 49 proposals and 326 specific measures¹, structured around nine themes:

- ▶ Climate change and the environment;
- ▶ Health;
- ▶ A stronger economy, social justice and jobs;
- ▶ EU in the world;
- ▶ Values and rights, rule of law, security;
- ▶ Digital transformation;
- ▶ European democracy;
- ▶ Migration;
- ▶ Education, culture, youth and sport.

Behind the numbers and between the lines of these concrete suggestions is a vision of a Europe that makes people's everyday lives easier - in rural or urban areas - that tackles our generational challenges head on and that ultimately delivers on what matters the most to people. From the food they eat, to the air they breathe and the nature that they enjoy. From having access to affordable healthcare, education and housing to feeling safe and secure within those schools and homes.

Across the board, the proposals call for Europe to focus on delivering social protections and fairness, while upholding its values and the rule of law. They highlight the need for Europe to pool its strength and diversity to tackle the biggest issues of our generation – from pandemics and war to twin green and digital transitions or demographic change. Finally, a strong recurring theme across the different areas is the need for Europe to be more independent and better able to provide for itself in vital areas from energy and sustainable food, materials and medicines, to digital chips and green technologies, cybersecurity, security and defence. Taken together, the measures proposed by the Conference call for Europe to be more active in areas that matter collectively or individually to people.

¹ Read the final report on the Conference platform.

Assessing the proposals

In order to follow up in the most transparent and direct way on the Conference proposals, a first analysis is needed to see what is necessary to implement them. **For this assessment to be credible, it is essential to stick to the spirit and the letter of what is proposed – without any re-interpretation or selection.** This is what is set out in the Annex to this Communication. The 49 proposals are divided up into the same thematic areas chosen by the Conference, with the Commission's assessment set out under each area.

The annex sets out four categories of responses: existing initiatives that address the proposals; those where the European Parliament and the Council are called upon to adopt; planned actions which will deliver on the ideas, building in new reflections from the Conference; and new initiatives or areas of work inspired by the proposals, falling within the remit of the Commission.

The first category is where the Commission is already implementing initiatives which directly responds to the proposals. This could include, for example, the European Climate Law, where legislation to enshrine EU climate targets into law has already come into force. Or the Digital Services Act which will ensure that the online environment remains a safe space, safeguarding freedom of expression and opportunities for digital businesses. It also includes the establishment of HERA, the Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority, to help Europe better prepare and react to cross-border health threats. Or the historic agreements that have been reached on minimum wages and women on boards. It also includes concrete initiatives to strengthen Europe's international partnerships and global role, for instance through the Global Gateway strategy to invest in smart, clean and secure infrastructure around the world, in line with EU values.

The second category is where proposals have been made by the Commission and the co-legislators are currently working. In some cases, this provides added impetus to speed up the legislative work, for example on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, the Artificial Intelligence Act, or initiatives to strengthen the circular economy in areas such as batteries, or sustainable products. It also includes the proposals made under the Fit for 55 package, which are essential to meet Europe's climate targets and also reduce its energy dependence. Or our initiative to boost the EU's resilience and tech sovereignty through measures such as the Chips Act.

The third category includes those areas where the Commission is already planning to make proposals and will take into account the suggestions made by the Conference. This includes, the Media Freedom Act which will aim to safeguard the pluralism and independence of the media in the EU internal market, and a legislative proposal to strengthen our supply of raw materials critical to the twin transitions or the new European Innovation Agenda. Or the legislative framework which will aim to accelerate and make the transition to sustainable food systems easier. In the coming weeks and months, the Commission will also make proposals that respond directly to some of the proposals, whether on restoring our nature or banning products made by forced labour from entering the EU market.

Finally, **the fourth area is where proposals made by the Conference are partly or wholly new** and require new initiatives or proposals to be made by the Commission. The areas in which the Conference has proposed new work include a greater focus on improving understanding of mental health issues and proposals to better address them across Europe. Other recommendations focus on nutrition and food security, as well as improving information on the eco-footprint and

animal welfare track-record of products. A coordinated European approach to the monitoring of the darknet, as well as a stronger focus on cryptocurrency mining, are also put forward.

The follow-up principles

The assessment shows a clear direction and identifies areas where the Commission will need to make proposals. The Commission will do so in the **most pragmatic way possible**, whether through legislation or otherwise. It will make full use of its right of initiative under the Treaties, with due regard for the subsidiarity and proportionality principles and better law-making rules. This includes evaluating the probable impact of the policy options at hand, ensuring that no negative consequences might arise and examining at which level decision-making is the most effective.

It should also be noted that there are also many areas which require the Commission to take **non-legislative action**, either because of limited legislative competence or because it is the best way to reach the desired outcome. Equally, not all the proposals are within the Commission's competence to take forward, and some may be best initiated by the other EU institutions, by Member States or by local and regional authorities.

The first set of new proposals will be announced in President von der Leyen's **State of the Union address** in September 2022, as well as in the accompanying Letter of Intent. These proposals will be amongst those to be included in the 2023 Commission Work Programme. Some should also feature in the joint legislative priorities agreed between the EU institutions and future Commission Work Programmes.

Treaties: Making the most of what we have, changing if we need

In following up to these proposals, **new reforms and policies should not be mutually exclusive to discussions on Treaty change**. Treaty change should not be an end in itself and for the vast majority of measures, there is much that can and will need to be done under the existing treaties. Just like constitutional texts of the Member States, the EU treaties are living instruments. The EU institutions and the Member States have agreed throughout this Commission's mandate to use the full potential of the EU treaties, when procuring billions of vaccines for citizens across Europe, or kickstarting the economy of the future through NextGenerationEU. In that time, the EU has also set an ambitious and legally binding path to climate neutrality, redesigned the rules of the game in the digital world and supported small businesses in retaining their staff during the pandemic through the SURE programme. All of this work was made possible due to political will shown by the institutions working in sync, in order to respond to the urgent nature of the challenges.

There is also untapped potential within the existing Treaties which could help respond to the Conference's proposals, notably by using the **'passerelle clauses' to move to qualified majority voting in certain policy fields**. This was explicitly called for by President von der Leyen in her Political Guidelines and State of the Union address, in areas such as energy, taxation, and for important aspects of the Common Foreign and Security Policy such as sanctions and human rights.

However, some of the ideas set out by the Conference are truly innovative, calling on the EU to take new, as yet unexplored, avenues. Within these, some proposals explicitly call for treaty change. This includes areas such as health or defence.

The Conference has created a new momentum to focus on renewing and improving the European project, building on its foundations and updating them where necessary. As outlined by President von der Leyen in her speech to the Conference, **the Commission will always be on the side of those who want to reform the European Union to make it work better, including through Treaty change where that may be necessary.**

In this spirit, the Commission welcomes the European Parliament's willingness to use, for the first time, its powers acquired under the Lisbon Treaty to propose amendments to the Treaties. The Parliament has set out a number of areas where in its view changes to the Treaties should be discussed within a **Convention**. The Commission stands ready to fully play its institutional role in the procedure set out in Article 48 of the Treaty on European Union, and in particular to give its opinion in response to a consultation by the European Council.

3. THE FUTURE: PUTTING CITIZENS AT THE HEART OF EUROPEAN DEMOCRACY

Beyond the quality and quantity of policy proposals and its impetus for reform, the Conference also gave a snapshot of **how a European public space can flourish and how our democracy can be enriched, at European, national, regional and local level**, by involving citizens. It brought about hundreds of "town hall" or "coffee shop" style deliberations and discussions in every corner of Europe. New deliberative formats – such as the multilingual digital platform, the European Citizens' Panels – enabled Europeans to share their ideas on the issues they considered important to build the future of our Union. And it sought the views of the hardest to reach, those who rarely engage with politics or perhaps have not voted in previous European elections.

A number of the Conference's innovations provide a guide as to how better include citizens in priority and ambition setting, as well as in designing and making policies at the European level. Building on the Conference, and on its own existing tools, **the Commission will propose ways to ensure citizens are given this closer role in EU policymaking.**

A central and particularly innovative feature of the Conference was the **European Citizens' Panels**. A total of some 800 randomly selected citizens, a third of which were young people, met for three deliberative sessions each and made recommendations. A number of Member States organised National Citizens' Panels based on the same principles.

Building on this success, **the Commission will enable Citizens Panels to deliberate and make recommendations ahead of certain key proposals**, as part of its wider policy making and in line with Better Regulation principles. Depending on the issue, these can either be pan-European or smaller targeted panels to address specific policy issues. As was the case in the Conference, participants should be randomly selected. But they should also reflect Europe's diversity and demography. Young people should form a third of the participants. Where appropriate, a 'citizen report' will be integrated in the impact assessment, summarising the outcomes of these participatory and deliberative processes. When all participants are young people, this would be dubbed a 'youth test'. **The first of this new generation of Citizens Panels will be launched in the context of the 2022 State of the Union address.**

The **Multilingual Digital Platform** enabled participants to share and deliberate on their ideas with just a few clicks, as well as provide a home for the many events taking place across Europe under the umbrella of the Conference. By May 2022, close to 5 million individual visitors had

visited the Multilingual Digital Platform and there were over 750,000 participants, 18,000 ideas debated, and over 6,500 events.

Responding to the calls from the Conference participants for the setting up of online consultation platforms, the Commission's **Have Your Say portal** will become a one-stop-shop for online citizen engagement, bringing together all information on citizens' engagement mechanisms running in the Commission. This new online hub will integrate key features of the Conference's multilingual digital platform: direct exchanges between citizens, commenting – in all EU official languages thanks to eTranslation – but also online polls and hosting online participatory events. It will form the basis for a new ecosystem of democratic engagement and innovation.

These are part of the Commission's wider efforts to strengthen Europe's democracy and public space. At a time of rising conflict and authoritarianism around the world, **democracies and democratic resilience require attention and nurturing more than ever**. Under the European Democracy Action Plan, the Commission has recently proposed measures to strengthen European political parties and enable them to campaign across border, as part of measures aimed at protecting election integrity and open democratic debate. It also made proposals to uphold and strengthen the rights of EU mobile citizens, in particular for European elections. In a similar vein, the European Parliament has recently proposed to reform the **EU electoral law** and made proposals to include transnational lists in the next European elections. The Commission will support the European Parliament in securing an agreement on the electoral law in the Council.

This is also an opportunity to start a reflection on how the experience gained in the Conference can be translated into the fostering of a European civic identity. This would involve, notably, assessing how education and communication can provide space for the development of this type of engagement.

4. CONCLUSION

As set out in this Communication and its annex, the Conference provided much to work on. But it has also provided much to learn and much to keep – not least the energy and momentum to improve Europe and help it move forward. While the Conference may have finished, the work is only starting to follow up on the clear proposals made to improve Europe and to ensure that all citizens can continue to have their say on policies that affect them.

The Conference has shown that Europeans are determined to build a better future. They see the European Union as a way to achieve this and want to build it together with elected representatives. A Europe of peace and prosperity, fairness and progress, a Europe that is social and sustainable, that is caring while also daring to implement bold policies that will benefit all generations. Their vision is clear, and the many initiatives set out in this Communication will enable the Commission to start putting that vision into concrete action.

The follow-up to the outcome of the Conference is a shared responsibility of the participating institutions, according to their institutional remit and in respect of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. Clear and effective communication will be essential in this follow-up, notably to ensure buy-in from citizens and build trust in the process and its outcomes. To keep citizens informed and to keep up the momentum, a **Conference Feedback Event** will be organized in autumn 2022. This event would be the moment for communicating how the three EU institutions are following up and to take stock of progress at that stage of the process. It will be an opportunity

to create a clear and cohesive link between the outcomes of the Conference and the future activities that it has inspired.