

## **SHAPING A FUTURE FOR EUROPE, WORTH LIVING IN**

### ***Greek concept paper for the Conference for the Future of Europe in the aftermath of the covid-19 crisis and beyond***

#### **Introductory remarks**

Long before the outbreak of the corona-virus pandemic, there was a broadly shared understanding that the Conference could serve as a major opportunity for reflecting on the further course of the European integration and on how to bridge the gap between the EU and its citizens. It was equally understood that the Conference should focus on topics truly relevant to our citizens and that it was necessary to ensure their widest and most active participation throughout the whole process.

While still grappling with the consequences of the covid-19 pandemic, this common ground proves all the more valid. Moreover, the challenges posed by the crisis, especially the socio-economic impact and the crucial questions of solidarity and cohesion, shed a different light on this endeavour. The debate on the future of Europe has taken an existential dimension highlighting, amongst others, the daunting stakes of EU's resilience, its strategic autonomy and its place in a fast changing and increasingly unpredictable world.

#### **Expected results and sequencing**

Our starting point is the needs and aspirations of the citizens across the EU; their views about how the EU should look like in the future. What matters for our citizens, first and foremost, are, those policies and institutions that make the EU relevant for their lives.

In order to ensure the widest possible – and active - involvement of the citizens in the deliberations, it is advisable that the main emphasis of the Conference be dedicated to the core substance, to fundamental political issues, such as common policies and institutions. It is essential, for the success of the Conference, to strike the right balance between policies, on the one hand, and procedural and methodological issues, on the other. Extra care must be taken so that the latter does not take precedence to the detriment of the former.

#### **EU policies / indicative topics of the substantive discussion**

There is no point in pre-determining an exhaustive list of topics. The priorities set out in the EU's Strategic Agenda (2019-2024) can still serve as a basic guidance commanding broader consensus. As a reminder, these priorities are: protecting citizens and fundamental freedoms; developing a strong and vibrant economic base; building a climate-neutral, green, fair and social Europe; promoting European interest and values on the global stage.

Drawing on the lessons learnt from the covid-19 crisis, the overarching preoccupation for all parties participating in the Conference should be how to strengthen the European Union and how to enhance its sustainability, as well as its internal and external resilience to crises and its place in the world. It is therefore crucial to put at the very centre

of the debate the pivotal question of how to permanently endow our Union with the essential means and resources, on which any meaningful Future for the EU will depend. This is a broader question, including the finances of the EU and its multiannual budget (MFF) but going far beyond that. It encompasses a wide range of issues to be dealt with, as well as new specialized bodies to be set up, some of which are indicatively presented below.

It is of key importance that our citizens, the civil society at large, actively engage in the discussions on this most central question. Part of the widespread feelings of estrangement and disillusion with the EU Institutions afflicting many of our citizens is linked, precisely, to the perception that crucial issues are decided “top-down” by some remote supranational bureaucracies without the “*vox populi*” being adequately listened to.

The current crisis presents a first class opportunity to inject new life into the European project to serve as a springboard for the future: we should devote more energy to the European project in all its dimensions: deepening further European integration, without neglecting enlargement and strengthening EU’s global role and influence. It is only by carrying forward the European integration process that Europe can play a leading role at a global level and achieve its much sought after strategic autonomy.

In particular:

#### **A. Deepening the European integration, while enhancing EU’s global role**

**1. The unfinished business on EMU.** If we are to make Europe resilient enough to weather successfully future crises and enhance its influence in world affairs, it is essential to resume work, at an accelerated pace, with respect to the missing links of the Economic and Monetary Union (completion of Banking Union and Capital Markets Union, *inter alia*).

**2. Harnessing globalization<sup>1</sup> or the challenge of a resilient Europe.** The covid-19 crisis demonstrated Europe’s vulnerabilities with respect to crises; this is particularly true with regard to certain value and supply chains of medical equipment and pharmaceuticals. Public Health is not an EU exclusive competence, yet citizens across the Union now expect much more concerted action. Private sector in this critical area should be strongly encouraged and incentivized to make its contribution in building a more resilient Europe. We should also consider action at EU level (e.g. recommendations issued by the Commission) that would ensure the uniform implementation of the measures taken. In the same vein, we should cast a fresh look at the existing civil protection structures of the EU and reflect on how we can improve and streamline the coordination among our respective national civil protection services. Again, providing the necessary means and resources is a precondition for a resilient Europe and its strategic autonomy.

The crisis also unveiled the many downsides of globalization and of the close interdependence of the economies, at a global scale. In more political terms, it brought under a different light the question of global governance and the place of the EU therein. Hence the need to reflect on how the EU can credibly reassert its role in the world scene, by

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<sup>1</sup> The reflection paper produced in 2017 by the Commission, under this title, is still relevant in many respects

using its values, its standards and its rich legal and institutional culture and its fundamental guiding principles, advancing effective, values-based multilateralism in the first place.<sup>2</sup>

**3. The ecological and climate challenge, the Green Deal.** An important part of the discussion about the future of Europe should focus on advancing topics such as climate action, biodiversity, waste, oceans protection, desertification, sustainable energy and energy efficiency, circular economy. Important components of this discussion are how green transition is affecting regions and sectors of the economy within the EU, as well as the link between climate change and migratory flows stemming from other continents, that Europe is trying to manage. Europe should lead the way within the international community in this wide set of interlinked issues. An equally critical subject matter for the debate, in the same context, would be how to promote a modern, innovative, green and digitalized agriculture - and fisheries - contributing to the sustainability of the European countryside and seas and the security of our food supply.

**4. The scientific and technological challenge.** Much of the major challenges for Europe, before the covid-19 crisis and even more after it, are closely related to the so-called “triangle of knowledge”. The relevant discussions should revolve around education, innovation and research, on the clear understanding that without substantial progress, indeed a paradigm shift, in this field, Europe cannot address effectively the high existential stakes of well-being, economic and social reshaping and, ultimately, exert its soft power and role on global scale.

In this context, special emphasis should be put on health, pharmaceuticals and especially bio-medical sciences. It is time we examined establishing an equivalent of CERN<sup>3</sup> for Biosciences, Health and Pharma, which would become, like CERN in Physics, a central point of reference worldwide. The time is ripe for thinking seriously about putting in place a model European centre of excellence in these critical areas to advance ground-breaking scientific research but also business development.

**5. The challenge of Migration within a broader context.** We should view this challenge primarily as a common European one.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, building a more resilient and integrated Europe means also coming up with a truly unified European answer to the complex issues of migration and asylum. We need to come up with a common holistic approach and a long-term vision, based on solidarity and burden sharing. We need to revisit this thematic area as one more missing link in further deepening the European integration process.

It is also worthwhile, to bring into the debate the question of legal migration – an area of, largely, national competence of Member States – seeking better coordination and, at best, innovative synergies. A discussion at European level on this topic would be meaningful if we put it into a broader societal and geopolitical context: some crucial

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<sup>2</sup> See also Spain’s paper of last May “The Conference on the Future of Europe and Global Governance after covid-19

<sup>3</sup> Conseil Européen de Recherche Nucléaire

<sup>4</sup> See also Italy’s paper of last February “Using the Conference on the Future of Europe to shape a real European Political Discourse”

parameters of this question relate to the demographic structure and declining trends across Europe, how we wish our societies to look like in the future, the link with Europe's economic development, the demographic trends in some areas of our wider neighbourhood, Africa and South Asia.

### **B. Enlarging the EU, as another way to make Europe more resilient, domestically and globally.**

Alongside deepening, enlargement should be seen as the other side of the same coin, as the indispensable complement of the overall European integration process. The pandemic crisis has made even more manifest the strong bonds of solidarity between EU and its partners in the Western Balkans. After a long period of time where a feeling of relative stagnation was prevalent, the EU integration process of the region was given a new impetus under the Bulgarian and the Croatian Presidencies, ensuring a continuity with the strategy of the European perspective of the Balkans inaugurated with the "Thessaloniki Agenda" (June 2003).

The enlargement and neighbourhood policies must become a distinct topic of discussion in the Conference, both in its own merits and in conjunction with the broader debate about the resilience of the EU, at home and in the world. In this framework, a more credible, dynamic, predictable and political EU process, based on the recently adopted EU accession methodology, needs to make clearer what the positive consequences progress on reforms can bring (incentives), and what the negative consequences will be when there is no progress (reversibility).

### **C. Bringing the EU institutions into the debate**

Our institutions are exemplary and trustworthy and remain the embodiment of our values and the backbone of the EU. We should now focus our attention on rendering them even more functional, efficient and oriented towards the common good, so that they can increase our resilience and our ability to respond to future challenges.

### **Citizens participation in the Conference**

It is of paramount importance to ensure the widest possible participation of our citizens in the various thematic discussions of the Conference. The democratic character of the Conference – apart from being a value *per se* – is the best guarantee for its successful outcome, one that could be sustainable in the long run. The three major EU Institutions, with due respect to their distinct functions provided for in the Treaties, should work hand in hand in making the necessary arrangements that would provide ample space for the active engagement of citizens throughout the whole process. In a similar vein, it is very essential that our national Parliaments engage actively, in the deliberations of the Conference.

National Parliaments can also be instrumental in helping set up the appropriate channels ensuring the much needed participation of our citizens.

In this context, it is imperative to focus on our youth. The Future of Europe belongs to them. Young people across Europe should be encouraged, and enabled, to take active part in all strands and procedures of the Conference. EU Institutions, together with individual Member States, need to come up with creative, “out of the box” solutions that will ensure the fullest possible involvement of the young generations in all deliberations, right from the beginning.

While youth should be at the center of the process, there is also merit in reflecting on how we could benefit from the wisdom of citizens of senior age as appropriate, taking also into account the special demographic features of Europe.

### **How to manage the outcome of the Conference**

On the question whether the Conference should lead to a revision of the Treaties or not, the most sensible and prudent approach is to be open-minded and avoid dogmatism. There can be no foregone conclusions. The Conference will be an evolving collective dialogue, only towards the end of which we will have a clearer idea on what it would be desirable to come next. Any anticipation of the outcome and its sequels cannot be productive, at this stage. The democratic character of the Conference, with the active participation of the citizens, implies that the outcome is the end-result of a free and inclusive dialogue, as it happens with every truly democratic process, after all. Let us concentrate our energy and our creative spirit, primarily, in what really matters to our citizens. Time will show what will be the right course of action after the conclusion of the Conference. A possible amendment of the Treaties can be solely made according to the provisions set out in article 48 of the TEU.