

War in Ukraine shows: Europe needs fundamental reforms

Dear Europeans,

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has once again revealed the need for reform in the European Union. A unified and decisive diplomatic response to the aggression was slowed down and weakened in voting rounds. Differing energy policy positions among EU member states also prevent an autonomous European stance towards autocratic states and harbour the danger of blackmail.

In view of their own vulnerability, European leaders expressed their desire for a stronger Europe in the weeks following the Russian attack. These demands must not disappear again in the drawers. They must be our mandate to reform the European Union in the coming months, to make it more resilient and more democratic!

With the conference on the future of Europe, there is already a roadmap for the necessary reforms. 800 citizens, randomly selected across the EU, have been working on concrete reform proposals over the past months as part of the Future Conference. Although they were drawn up before the invasion, they read like a direct response to the war in Europe's neighbourhood: an EU army, the replacement of oil and gas imports with renewable energies, an end to national vetoes.

A total of 178 recommendations were formulated, which will now be translated into concrete policies and reforms in the plenary of the Future Conference. The conference will deliver a result by 9 May 2022.

Highlights from the [40 recommendations](#) of the EU Citizens' Panel "EU in the World and Migration":

- A European army for defence, disaster relief and missions on behalf of the United Nations (Recommendation 20).
- Independence from oil and gas imports by replacing them with renewable energies from the sun and wind, by more trains instead of more cars (recommendation 2).
- For majority decisions instead of unanimity, i.e. the abolition of vetoes (recommendation 21)
- Guarantee the health and safety of migrants through EU-organised welcome centres (Recommendation 10) and a binding system for the distribution of asylum seekers (Recommendation 33)

Highlights from the [48 recommendations](#) of the EU Citizens' Panel "A stronger economy, social justice and employment/Education, culture, youth and sport/Digital transformation":

- Minimum wages everywhere in Europe in relation to purchasing power (recommendations 1 and 30).
- Alignment of taxes that allows differences but ends tax avoidance (recommendations 13 and 31)
- Right to affordable energy (Recommendation 10), to access to the internet (Recommendation 17), to minimum social standards including minimum pensions (Recommendation 21), access to social housing when needed (Recommendation 25), better and harmonised rights at birth of children (26) and for families for marriage and adoption (27)

Highlights of the [51 recommendations](#) of the EU Citizens' Panel on Climate Change and Environment/Health:

- More investment in research and supply of clean energy (recommendation 9)
- Recipients of EU agricultural subsidies should follow clear environmental standards, they should promote sustainable agriculture (recommendation 12), antibiotics should only be used when absolutely necessary (recommendation 17)
- Health and health care should be a shared competence between the EU and the EU Member States, the EU Treaty should be amended for this purpose (Recommendation 49).

Highlights from the [39 recommendations](#) of the Citizens' Panel "Democracy, Values, Rule of Law, Security":

- A European Constitution that protects democracy and fundamental rights and is voted on by citizens.
- Financial sanctions for violations of the rule of law
- A right to vote for EU citizens, directly for European party lists with candidates from many member states.
- European public investment to create good jobs and improve and equalise the quality of life across the EU.
- Large companies should be taxed properly, tax havens in the EU should be abolished.

The Council is slowing down - at the wrong time!

In the last 7 weeks of the Future Conference until 9 May, it is now about the politicians' response to the citizens' proposals. Even weeks before the end of the conference, there are EU governments that do not want to give an answer to the citizens. In a paper, the Swedish government rejects any response from EU governments. The paper is supported by 10 countries. Citizens in the plenary of the EU Future Conference protest against the refusal in the Council of Member States. One citizen [demanded](#) on behalf of many others: "We citizens want to know from the Council which of the recommendations you support. We want to know before 9 May."

What happens now

On 21 March, the Conference Secretariat sends out written templates to all working groups. These templates turn the citizens' recommendations into proposals for conference conclusions. On 25-26 March, the conference working groups discuss and decide on the submissions to the plenary. The plenary will then receive these reports. On 8 and 9 April, possibly also 29 and 30 April, the plenary will discuss and decide on the conference conclusions. On 9 May, the final declaration will be made by Roberta Metsola, President of the European Parliament, Ursula von der Leyen, President of the EU Commission and the then newly elected French President.

The paper of the Federal Government takes over the most important demands of the Green Group in the European Parliament and the EU Citizens' Panel: <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blob/2516726/0508a57355d7214e585d1ca03c94872d/220311-non-paper-data.pdf>

- open for the convening of a constitutional convention
- Replace the unanimity rule in the Common Foreign and Security Policy with qualified majority voting.
- Further develop the EU internally in order to ensure its ability to act even with a growing number of member states due to enlargement.
- Implement the climate goal of the Paris Agreement beyond the Fit for 55 package, also by reforming European agriculture towards sustainability.

- Reducing the use of pesticides and fertilisers
- Investment offensive for a climate-friendly and digital infrastructure in Europe
- Establish a European media platform
- Create EU legal forms for associations and foundations
- Strengthen the European Parliament's right of initiative in the legislative process.
- Uniform European electoral law with partly transnational lists and a binding system of leading candidates
- Increase the transparency of procedures and decision-making in the EU institutions.
- Strengthen the EU Commission's annual rule of law report through country-specific recommendations and independent expertise.
- Apply the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights also to national action
- Promote upward convergence across the EU, implement the European Pillar of Social Rights and eliminate social inequalities

Final report from conference online platform: Citizens want to abolish national vetoes

On the online platform <https://futureu.europa.eu>, support for 16,916 ideas was collected for the last time until 20 February. 6 of the top 10 that emerged call for the abolition of national vetoes on decisions among EU member states in the Council, specifically the ideas ranked 1, 4, 5, 8, 9 and 10.

1) Together we are stronger: A democratic European Federation - 935 votes

<https://futureu.europa.eu/processes/Democracy/f/6/proposals/178>

...calls for EU laws to be adopted by majority vote in Parliament and in the representation of Member States, constitutional amendments to be adopted by qualified majority vote

2) For a mechanism of clarity on the right to self-determination - 905 votes

<https://futureu.europa.eu/processes/Democracy/f/6/proposals/248887>

3) 10 million votes: Make Catalan an official EU language - 823 votes

<https://futureu.europa.eu/processes/ValuesRights/f/12/proposals/254369>

4) Abolish the Council veto! (Petition to the MEPs of the Conference) - 757 votes

<https://futureu.europa.eu/processes/Democracy/f/6/proposals/218165>

5) The EU needs better language learning - 718 votes

<https://futureu.europa.eu/processes/Education/f/36/proposals/23893>

6) A reform plan for a citizen-centred European democracy - 611 votes

<https://futureu.europa.eu/processes/Democracy/f/6/proposals/56299>

...contains: "4. ensuring the EU's capacity to act through majority voting on all issues in the Council".

7) Science-intensive technologies for healthy longevity: development and access - 596 votes

<https://futureu.europa.eu/processes/Health/f/3/proposals/826>

8) There can be no real European democracy without an autonomous EU fiscal authority. - 585 votes

<https://futureu.europa.eu/processes/Democracy/f/6/proposals/8515>

...calls for the EU budget and taxes to be decided by majority vote of Parliament and Council

9) Making the EU budget work for Europeans: a fiscal union - 580 votes

<https://futureu.europa.eu/processes/Economy/f/10/proposals/188>

...demands "The introduction of new EU taxes should be based on co-decision by the European Parliament and the Council, without any individual member state having the right to block them."

10) No double standards in the defence of democracy and the rule of law - 573 votes.

<https://futureu.europa.eu/processes/ValuesRights/f/12/proposals/250174>

...calls for "The unanimity rule for Article 7 TEU should be changed to qualified majority voting to avoid opening the door to abuse (i.e. two member states with serious violations of the rule of law or human rights join forces to veto Article 7 on their behalf)" referring to Hungary and Poland.

Daniel Freund - Mitglied des Europäischen Parlaments

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