



Council of the
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NOTE

From: Presidency
To: Council
Subject: Conference on Future of Europe

Delegations will find attached a discussion document for an exchange of views of Ministers in the prospect of defining the Council's position.

CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

The European Council considered 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. It asked the Croatian Council Presidency to work towards defining a Council position on the content, scope, composition and functioning of such a conference and to engage, on this basis, with the European Parliament and the Commission.

The European Parliament adopted its Resolution at its Plenary on 15 January 2020 laying out its position on the set-up and scope of the Conference. The European Commission adopted its Communication on 22 January 2020 as its contribution for the discussion between the three institutions.

In order to be ready to engage with the Parliament and the Commission on an equal institutional footing in shaping the Conference on the Future of Europe, the Council should prepare its own position.

Based on the exchange of views held so far between the Member States and their individual and joint contributions, the Presidency identified a number of converging elements that could form a basis for a Council position for engagement with the European Parliament and the Commission, as presented below. For further guidance, the Presidency seeks the views of Ministers at the General Affairs Council on 28 January 2020, with the intention to finalise the Council position at the level of Coreper as soon as possible.

A. THE CONTENT AND SCOPE OF THE CONFERENCE

1. In a world full of challenges and uncertainties, the expectations of our citizens are high and they deserve to be properly addressed at EU level, contributing to a joint vision of the direction the EU should take in the next decade and beyond. A large variety of different views and opinions - of EU institutions, Member States' governments, national parliaments, citizens, civil society and other stakeholders should be taken into account.

2. Building on existing experiences and frameworks, the Conference on the Future of Europe could 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 highlight the democratic legitimacy 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.
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 current Union framework offers broad potential to allow these challenges to be addressed in an effective manner.
4. We need to ensure that the Conference focuses on topics that truly matter to our citizens, with long lasting impacts and wide outreach. Effective communication efforts will be essential in this regard. We note in particular the Commission's readiness to contribute to these efforts with various existing outreach tools.

In order to make the discussions relevant to citizens, the content of the Conference could be centred around several key topics, wide enough to provide sufficient space for all participants to express their views. These issues could include:

- globalisation and other societal challenges (fair competition vs. fragmented spheres of regulation and economy; demographic challenges; migration and people movements);
- sustainability issues (economic, environmental, social), including green transition and climate neutrality by 2050 (competitiveness; regional impacts; equality and social justice);
- innovation and digital transformation (generational divides; open competition vs. protectionism);
- fundamental values, rights and freedoms (freedom of expression vs. disinformation; inclusivity vs. intolerance; public trust vs. distrust in institutions; education and culture);

- international role of the EU (interests and values; multilateralism; security and defence; border protection; EU external action).

In what will be a broad and open-ended process, the participants may raise other topics they deem relevant for the future of Europe.

B. ORGANISATION AND METHOD OF THE CONFERENCE

1. 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.
2. The organisation of the Conference could be based on a number of key principles: 1) equality between the institutions at all levels, 2) respect for each institution's prerogatives, 3) effectiveness and avoidance of unnecessary bureaucracy.
3. The Conference should build on the successful holding of citizens' dialogues over the past two years and foresee broad consultation of 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.
4. 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.
5. Participation could include MEPs, Member States' and Commission representatives, national parliaments, as well as the Committee of the Regions and the Economic and Social Committee. The involvement of citizens and civil society needs to ensure a wide representation of different groups in our society.
6. Governance of the Conference should be lean and streamlined and should respect the main principles listed above. 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.

The Conference could be placed under the authority of an eminent and independent European personality, to act as its single chair, and to be selected by mutual agreement of the three institutions; or under the authority of a collegiate presidency constituted by the EP, the Commission and the Council on an equal footing. In each case, there should also be a steering group composed of representatives of each institution. The current and incoming COSAC presidencies could be associated as observers to the steering group. 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 should be represented by the Member States holding the rotating Presidency during the period covered by the work of the Conference¹.

7. 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 and gender.
8. Building on the methods and results of the citizens' dialogues and consultations, the Conference, with the assistance in particular of the Commission, the Committee of the Regions and the Economic and Social Committee and national parliaments should ensure proper involvement of citizens and stakeholders through debates in Member States, including at regional level, as well as through the internet/digital platforms.
9. Activities could include: (i) main conferences/events (kick-off, mid-term and final) in Brussels or other location(s), e.g. in the country 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 and make contributions to the Conference.

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

10. The Conference could be launched on 9 May 2020, recognising the symbolism of Europe Day as well as marking of the 70th Anniversary of the Signing of the Schuman Declaration.
11. The mandate for the Conference could take the form of a Joint Declaration by the Council, the EP and the Commission, reflecting shared views on content and process.

C. OUTCOMES

1. The outcome of the Conference should be reflected in a report to the European Council in 2022.
2. The EU institutions will decide on how to follow up to this report, each within their own sphere of competence in accordance with the Treaties and in the light of the conclusions of the European Council.

Questions to steer the discussion of ministers:

- Would you agree that the elements as set out above may serve as a basis for developing a Council position to engage in talks with the European Parliament and the Commission, in line with European Council's conclusions of 12 December 2019?
- Are there any additional elements which, from your perspective, should be addressed and included when forming the Council's position?
