

## How to involve more citizens in the Conference on the Future of Europe?

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Faced with low mobilisation of EU citizens (less than 30,000 registrations on the #CoFoE platform as of 23/9/21 – But almost 2400 events), this contribution presents a strategy and three options to mobilise more citizens by the end of 2021. They are based on experiences of activating European citizens by civic tech methods specialised in combining social media and participatory debates that were used in the context of the 2019 EU elections.

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### Blowing up the Conference on the Future of Europe (the CoFoE) - How to do it? (Metaphorically...)

#### 1. Build a coalition around key issues grounded in No Veto

The #CoFoE on Future of Europe is currently animated by the European Parliament and civil society. The Council rather sees it as a nuisance, whilst Member States are busy fighting the Covid-19 pandemic and planning the recovery amidst a changing world order. The Commission provided the conference platform and will do the minimum service as it is busy with the Green Deal, Digital Transformation, the possible launch of a Health Union and the coming concerns of new immigration waves.

However, the #CoFoE will make 108 MEPs, rub shoulders with 108 national ones and up to 130 (and counting...) citizen representatives. **There is a small chance that they form coalitions around a small number of topics to push them through – ideally, we could mobilise around one issue – No Veto,<sup>1</sup> and embed other key issues around it.** Whatever comes out of the CoFoE is likely to be vetoed by some national governments. At least one or two national champion States are therefore needed in whatever coalition emerges. DE and FR will run key national elections between now and the end of the CoFoE, so no major drive can come from these countries, even if President Macron could pick-up some issues as part of his re-election campaign. IT and ES could be such national champions:

--> **For IT:** i. It is the country most dependent on NextGenEU funds and the related National Reform & Resilience Plan (NRPP) to boost its economy. Without Italian success and a quality EU, neither Italy nor Europe will become competitive again.

ii. The referendum is an instrument accepted by the political system to propose even epochal changes in the country; and by the citizens to mobilise and act. The modalities of CoFoE are reminiscent of referendum instruments that all know and accept.

iii. It is a founding member of the EU with a strong federal movement - and also structured oppositions to the EU. Debating the EU would be good for the EU.

iv. The European Parliament (and citizens' associations) are the actors in the current phase of CoFoE. Italy is well represented in all parliamentary groups of the EP, except for the Greens.

--> **For ES:** i. It's the 2nd country most dependent on NextGenEU funds and NRRP to boost its economy. Without Spain success and a quality EU, neither Spain nor Europe will be competitive again.

ii. The current government counts several former Commission staff as ministers and is deeply pro-European. It can foster a quality debate and muster a majority around some issues.

**These are initial proposals. More national governments could be targeted as more partners and capacities are brought on board.**

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<sup>1</sup> This would be a call to abolish the Veto at the EU Council – either for all or some competences, with the exact phrasing to be tested. The demand is catchy and ambitious, so that it shifts the [Overton Window](#) in terms of what is considered feasible in public debate.

## 2. Mobilize more citizens

As soon as key stakeholders such as UEF, a country, EU parties and movements agree on a topic and a communication angle, A4E can help structuring a campaign to **quickly mobilise more citizens and make them aware of the #CoFoE**. Beyond institutional and national campaigns, our experience shows that by using social media and influencers tactics & technologies one can quickly mobilise millions of citizens.

## 3. Organise Citizen Conventions in the framework of the #CoFoE – using the EU Platform and “Disciples of Europe”

Citizen conventions were used by FR and DE governments in 2018 to prepare the #EP2019 campaigns. Alliance4Europe ran its own pilots, while Pulse of Europe has organised HomeParliaments and participatory events across Europe. With the help of **thousands of ‘Disciples of Europe’**<sup>2</sup> organising or, more importantly, participating in and reporting on CoFoE events, there is the possibility to inform citizens for a quality debate, to sample the mood of the continent and its sensitivities, to eventually identify the 1 to 3 mobilising themes that could make the CoFoE fruitful. Citizens Take Over Europe, of which A4E is a leading partner, are currently organising citizen assemblies and events across Europe, with A4E providing communications coordination.

## 4. Launch a viral campaign of the type ran by different NGOs in the wake of #EP2019

Once identified, the 1 to 3 mobilising themes resulting from CoFoE-related events and communication, a viral campaign of the kind organised by Alliance4Europe & partners could influence the CoFoE (especially the plenary) to impose the themes on Europe's agenda. These key themes would be linked to the issue of ending the Council's Veto, for one clear and catchy call to action that can shift the political conversation.

Beware. The objective would not be to get an immediate result, a vote or a referendum on a new treaty: this requires a formal Convention and then an Intergovernmental Conference, as was done in 2003-2005. The CoFoE should eventually come up with key campaign points for the 2024 European elections. Strengthened by electoral legitimacy - especially if they will have lined up as real European coalitions, the winners of the #EP2024 elections should be able to propose profound reforms, or at least come under pressure to do so, supported by a parliamentary majority and a Commission leadership expressed by this majority.

The main reason to build up momentum for 2024 is that, if a reform of the treaties is launched in summer 2022, there is a strong risk that it will disrupt the 2024 European elections, instead of clarifying the issues. For more information on the reasons for this approach, see article by Clarotti, Costa and Leclercq, Euractiv, 22 January 2020<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> These are citizens familiar with European policies who are ready to be activated to organise, but above all participate in and report on #CoFoE events. There would be the members of foundations linked to the political groups in the EP, former 'EU ambassadors' who inform on EU affairs in their home countries, 'EU Seniors' who lecture on the EU, the members of the federalist UEF union and, finally, former EU parliamentarians now led by Jo Leinen. Acting together, they could help make sense of the #CoFoE.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.euractiv.com/section/future-eu/opinion/a-conference-on-the-future-of-eu-what-next-eu-elections-2024/>

Negative emotions like anger and injustice are leveraged by populists to mobilize voters. Alliance4Europe leveraged positive emotions such as friendship, solidarity and love. The #Vote4Friendship campaign reached 52 million Europeans on social and broadcast media over a period of 3 months.

**How does it work?** - Participation in European elections had been declining for 30 years. European nationalists and foreign opponents cited the declining trend to attack the world's second largest democracy. In synergy with other actors, including the European Federalists and Pulse of Europe, we developed the #VoteForFriendship campaign using positive and non-explicit messages. The viral marketing of the campaign is based on the fact that a core demographic of Europeans, the “Passive Positives”, have supportive views of Europe, but tend not to engage in politics or go out to vote. They respond well to positive value-based messaging around togetherness, hope, relationships and connections.

**The campaign launched 3 months before the election:**

1. A **campaign #VoteForFriendship 'testimonial' bracelet** that, on the verso, bears the words "Bad politicians are elected by good citizens who don't vote".
2. A proximity action started by the A4E team contacted **artists (first and foremost) but also sportsmen (such as Liverpool coach Jurgen Klopp, a member of Pulse of Europe) and other influencers** (such as Polish top model Anja Rubik, who has 3 million followers). The goal was to have the bracelet seen and distributed to followers or supporters who requested it.
3. A **video of 30 European artists (from the 28 Member States)** singing the song "Friends will be Friends" with right donated to us by the **band Queen**.
4. Actions targeting specific audiences. The **#PreUnionBar** gave young people in Central Europe an experience of what life was like before the European Union was there. This satirical comedy with well-known influencers in Warsaw reached millions with a vivid physical illustration of the value of European unity. **#OneHourForEurope** mobilized European and National officials who donated 1 hour per week to meet communities that vote little - such as Romanian, Polish and Greek expats in Brussels and Luxembourg. **#HumansInTheEU** (still continuing) asks artists and citizens to excite readers with their European stories.
5. Actions were in sync with our partners including organisations such as Avaaz, WeMove and many more, and media partners like Euractiv, VoxEurope, and more.

**How much did it cost?** - Alliance4Europe raised around 440,000 euros through various 'funding rounds' and donations from German foundations, including BMW Foundation, Deutsche Post Foundation, Mercator, Alfred Herrhausen Gesellschaft and more.

**Impact and Analysis** - The #VoteForFriendship campaign showed the **potential of positive emotions to mobilize citizens to vote, with a reach of 52 million views across Europe across media, and organic social media networks of 3 million users**. Without saying it explicitly, making people aware of the importance of voting through emotions, slogans or experiences such as the comedy production #PreUnionBar made about 10 million citizens aware of the Action (at 0.1€ 'awareness rate' per citizen) and mobilized. The campaign was comparatively highly cost-effective.

**Challenges for the future**

The main challenge for the future is that social metrics suggest that hate, fear and resentment remain more effective emotions to mobilize voters. **Beyond Brexit and Trump, the case of the Belgian Vlaams Belang that recruited 500,000 followers by investing 125k € sets a standard**. After the 2019 vote, e.g. **this article in Politico** illustrates well their mobilization strategy using the concomitance of local, national and European votes.

**What is Alliance4Europe?** – It is a civic tech – a non-profit company aiming at driving democratic participation for a more democratic Europe. We act as a focal point and service provider to connect and coordinate civil society initiatives, gather and analyse campaign intelligence, and activate European citizens.

In 2016, the Brexit referendum and Trump's election awakened many European citizens to the fact that progress towards free, open and united societies was threatened by nationalism. **Alliance4Europe** was founded in late 2018 with 26 shareholders from different social movements, background and walks of life. Since 2019, it has built up a network of hundreds of partners for pan-European campaigns with a focus on civic tech and digital intelligence.

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