



*The Civil Society Organizations, indicated below, have signed the following Declaration on the **Rule of Law**, the **Multiannual Financial Framework**, the **European Conference on the Future of Europe** and an **Empower Roadmap** and have decided to send it to the European Parliament, the European Commission, the European Council, the Council of the Union, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.*

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## **EMPOWER CITIZENS FOR THE FUTURE OF EUROPE**

Whereas it is undoubtedly necessary and urgent to have an **aggiornamento** of the European Union for many reasons: the planetary instability, the very long financial and subsequent economic and social crisis with increasing the gap between the rich and the poor steadily widening; the follow-up of Brexit as a result of lies and fake news; the rise of nationalism; the manipulation of the information; the challenges faced in Europe as for democracy and human rights; the epochal phenomenon of migrations; the society 5.0, the challenges of climate change and the sustainable development;

Whereas the EU needs to adapt its governance and make a leap towards more resilience, solidarity, justice and trust;

Whereas strengthening governance capacity at the European level is critically important to responding effectively to the complex set of sustainability challenges facing our civilizations;

Whereas a public debate on the future of Europe should be opened after the failure of the Constitutional Treaty in 2005 and more than ten years after the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon in December 2009;

Whereas the lessons learnt from prior consultations, experimented with by the EU and national public administrations, show that they weren't productive without direct feedback and constructive dialogue with citizens;

Whereas the various experiences at different levels across Europe and at local level made by all our networks have offered innovative examples on how to empower European citizens in the EU and build a truly participatory democracy;

Have reached common points of view on the need to protect and enhance European values, to secure coherence between EU values, objectives and actions as fixed in the articles 2 and 3 of the EU Treaty and the Charter of Fundamental rights, to adopt a democratic and efficient method to change the course of the EU and build a united, fair and resilient Europe.

We pledge the following priorities and the next steps for the EU:

### **1. The respect of the Rule of Law and the European democracy.**

The Rule of Law is at the core of the EU system. It means and requires the respect of legality, the equality of citizens, the legal certainty, the independence of the judiciary, the accountability of the decision-makers and the protection of human rights.

We call on the creation of an **objective and impartial mechanism** to verify the application of the EU's values by all the Member States and the EU within the treaties as it has been proposed by the European Citizens Initiative (ECI) on the 8<sup>th</sup> of April 2019 (<https://www.formyrights.eu>).

We support the **enforcement of the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA)** in Wien and the constitution of an **independent Committee** according to the example of the Venice Committee acting in the framework of the Council of Europe.



In view of the review of the Treaties, we suggest that the power to contest the violation of the Rule of Law should attribute to the **Court of Justice** and introduce the **suspension of a Member State** according to the art. 8 of the Council of Europe and the art. 5 of the UN Charter.

In this framework we took notice with strong concern of the **recent developments in Poland** and the new bill introducing severe sanctions for judges who make decisions aimed to defend the independence of the Judiciary. We denounce this unacceptable break of the basic principles of the Rule of Law, namely limiting the freedom of a judge to direct questions to the European Court of Justice, we ask the European Commission to activate the article 258 TFEU as an urgent matter.

In view of the essential nature of a strong and independent civil society to any functioning democracy, we encourage the EU institutions and the Member States to **combat the rising number of governmentally aligned NGOs** and ensure the independence of NGOs across the EU.

We propose **measures to increase independent funding opportunities for CSOs** and increase transparency for CSOs to decrease the amount of governmentally aligned NGOs, organized and controlled by either governments or political parties.

## 2. The Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) from 2021 to 2025 and from 2026 to 2030

Europe's leaders agreed in Sibiu that *"we will give ourselves the means to match our ambitions. We will provide the Union with the means necessary to attain its objectives and carry through its policies"*.

It is undeniable that the *"negotiating box"* presented by the Finnish presidency, significantly smaller than the proposals of the Commission in May and June 2018, is **totally inadequate** to fulfill the EU's agenda for the next five years in the fields of SDGs, cohesion, young people, migration and border management, security and external action, research, investment and digital transformation. Moreover, the negotiations have been founded on the *"original sin"* of the MFF, largely nourished by national contribution without the vigorous support of an EU autonomous fiscal capacity.

We welcome the decision of the European Parliament to **freeze the negotiations on MFF** making clear that *"nothing is agreed until everything is agreed"*.

We ask the European Parliament, the Council and the EU Commission:

- to **re-establish the five-years programming** of the Delors Package-I and as proposed by the EP (5+5), which is more coherent from an economic and democratic point of view;
- to **open a dialogue with CSOs** according to the principle of a participatory budget giving the civil society representative the possibility to overlook the process and the decision making;
- to assure that the 2021-2025 and then 2026-2030 MFF are **coherent to the SDGs**, the European Green Deal and the Agenda 2030;
- to give to the EU its **own resources** and open the way to a complete **co-decision power of the EP** (expenses and revenues).

## 3. The Conference on the Future of Europe (and the Citizens' Agora)

The Conference on the Future of Europe is one of the top priorities of the new Commission chaired by Ursula von der Leyen and is due to start in 2020 and run for maximum two years.

Formal arrangements are currently under discussion by the EU institutions following the commitments assumed by the EU Commissioners during the hearings and the work done by the EP Conference of Presidents.

The EESC and the Committee of Regions have expressed from their side a great interest in the Conference on the future of Europe.

We welcome the opinion of the EP Constitutional Affairs Committee (AFCO) underlining that *"the 70th anniversary of the Schuman Declaration...can provide further impetus to the Conference"* and that *"the aim of*



*the Conference should be to engage directly the citizens through a bottom-up approach and that, in the long term, a permanent mechanism for engaging with the citizens in the reflection on the future of Europe should be envisaged”.*

We have taken note that *“the consultations should be organized using the most efficient, innovative and appropriate platforms, including online tools reaching all parts of the EU, in order to guarantee that any citizens can have a say during the work of the Conference...ensuring youth participation”* and that *“citizens will...participate in equal conditions as the institutional representatives”*.

We **welcome the meeting of the three European leaders** (David Sassoli, Ursula Von der Leyen and Charles Michel) that will take place at the end of January in the *Maison Jean Monnet* on the initiative of the EP President and we ask them to share our proposals.

With this in mind, we have renewed calls for **a bottom-up, building-site and free-standing and spontaneously organized events.**

We suggest modeling these events on the world-famous **Edinburgh Fringe Festival** to mobilize EU citizens ahead of the Future of Europe Conference. We discussed how a **“Europe Future Fringe”** would allow citizens to occupy the *“spaces in between”* whatever consultative processes and citizens dialogues emerge from the inter-institutional negotiations.

We support the proposal for a *Europe Future Fringe* to run in parallel with the formal consultations with civil society and EU citizens within the framework of the Future of Europe Conference itself. The *Europe Future Fringe* will be a self-organizing series of events which bring together a diversity of civil society initiatives and events.

The Conference on the Future of Europe should be preceded by a European **Common Declaration of European Nobel Laureates and Youth Movements**, celebrating the 70th anniversary of the Schuman Declaration and offering a vision of the EU of the 21st century that implements the SDGs by 2030.

On May 9th, 2020, the Presidents of all EU Institutions and bodies should open the Conference to address the transformation of EU, drawing inspiration from the European Common Declaration.

The Conference on the Future of Europe should open a public space to build the consensus between the representative and the participatory democracy well beyond mere consultations or citizen’s dialogues.

In this sense, the Civil Society organization partners of the European Commission and the programs as *Europe for Citizens* could be a valuable role of chain of information and dialogue with citizens. A special effort should be played to reach local communities engaging local governments in a coordinated manner following the example of the *“Pact of free cities”* between Bratislava, Budapest, Prague and Warsaw.

We suggest that the role of participatory democracy will be played in the framework of deliberative thematic Conventions or Citizens Agora using innovative ways:

- crowd sources
- the participatory budgeting
- Block-chains
- contact groups
- cultural and artistic festivals
- transnational Platforms

We favor the use of **online platforms** which can reach out to up to 450 million citizens by internet or mobile phone.

Such platforms must demonstrate how they can reach those individuals who are most marginalized and excluded from political influence and the answers of all participating population groups must be given weight according to the demographic structure.



Through such online platforms, citizens should be able to prioritize policy challenges in local, regional and macro-regional demographically representative fora linked to Citizens Dialogues.

In face-to-face fora with socio economic and gender representativity the citizens will further develop their visions.

In **thematic fora at transnational level** and with necessary technical assistance the citizens will develop their own European policy proposals to be presented and seriously discussed and considered in later thematic conventions that take place in different parts of the European Union with MEPs, the European Commission, Mayors and civil society organisations.

Both the Committee of Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee will be active in this process. All citizens fora as well as the thematic conventions should be streamed online and the citizens given the possibility for online feedback.

As concerns the Conference, it should be composed by an equal number of EU and national parliamentary members (54+54) sitting together in political European groups and involve the Commission and the Council (three members for each Institutions) on equal footing.

A **special session of Interparliamentary meetings** should take place during the German presidency of EU Council in Berlin or in Rome where the meetings held before the IGC on the Maastricht Treaty (November 1990) and where the EEC and Euratom Treaties have been signed in 1957.

Representatives of ECB, EESC, Committee of Regions, FRA, Euro just, Social Partners (ETUC, Business Europe and CEEP) as well as Ombudsman and EU Prosecutor should take an active role in the debates and final decisions.

When the Conference will meet in Brussels or Strasbourg it will be hosted by the EP and the secretariat will be provided both by the Commission and the EP. The President will be elected by the Conference between the MEPs. No Presidium or Steering Group will be created.

The Conference should respect two main elements of a true public debate:

- the **transnational level** with thematic and not national conferences in the Member States or in the Macro-regions avoiding the *"Brussels speaks to Brussels"*;
- the **transparency and publicity** of all the debates and the conclusions to be taken with a super-qualified majority.

The Conference must be preceded and accompanied – not tackled – by major proposals and decisions by the EU Institutions on climate change, digitalization, completion of EMU, migration, implementation of the Social Pillar, fight against inequalities and poverty, social market economy, Rule of Law as well as the Electoral Law System and the election of EU leaders.

This list means that the Conference shall not replace the role of EU Institutions and the EU decision-making in the development of the common policies.

This development will serve as a stimulus for the debate on the future of Europe while the debate will provide a fertile ground for facilitating consensus-building in the development of common policies.

The Conference will be a unique opportunity to tackle **six key issues** on:

- the role of EU in a globalized and instable world where the EU should repudiate wars as conflicts solution;
- the division of responsibilities at all the levels from the local to the European in the framework of a dynamic and renewed principle of subsidiarity;
- the fiscal capacity of the EU and the weight of the European budget to assure European common goods on the three dimensions of allocation, redistribution and stabilization;
- the achievement of SDGs before 2030;
- the political and institutional boundaries of EU and the relationship with the neighboring countries, namely the Mediterranean and Africa;



- the EU democratic governance for a united, fair and resilient Europe.

If a majority consensus will be reached to elaborate a new constitutional Treaty, the best way is to recognize the **leading role of the EP** in cooperation with the national Parliaments.

At the end of a constituent process, the EU citizens (*“sovereignty belongs to the people”*) will have to voice their opinion by means of referenda (**a pan-European referendum**) to be held the same day in all the Member States.

#### 4. An Empower Roadmap

The EU needs to adapt its governance towards system leadership for transformational change to be *“a global leader of the green economy and just transition, while climate is one of its priorities”*.

The Conference on the Future of Europe should design an **“empower roadmap”** making use of UN and World Bank reports demonstrating how digital tools could empower public authorities (at European, national and local levels) and individuals (as citizens, users, consumers, retail investors) to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs and climate agreements.

While addressing the twin crises by design - inequality and the planetary boundaries - bound together (as the Green New Deal for Europe) our system leadership should aim to **three objectives**:

- the greatest mobilization of people and resources ever in peacetime;
- innovative governance schemes and societal innovation towards more resilience, solidarity, justice;
- in a digital age, to build trust, share knowledge and monitor use of EU funds.

Milan, 8<sup>th</sup> January, 2020

EUROPEAN MOVEMENT-ITALY-ME/IT, ACCADEMIA EUROPEISTA DEL FRIULI VENEZIA GIULIA, AGORÀ LIBERALE, ALLEANZA ITALIANA PER LO SVILUPPO SOSTENIBILE-ASviS, ASSOCIAZIONE DI PROMOZIONE SOCIALE-ACMOS, ASSOCIAZIONE EUROPEA DEGLI INSEGNANTI-AEDE, ASSOCIAZIONE GIORNALISTI EUROPEI-AGE, ASSOCIAZIONE ITALIANA PER IL CONSIGLIO DEI COMUNI E DELLE REGIONI D'EUROPA-AICCRE, ASSOCIAZIONE LUCA COSCIONI, ASSOCIAZIONE NAZIONALE DONNE ELETTRICI-ANDE, ASSOCIAZIONE RICREATIVA E CULTURALE ITALIANA-ARCI, ASSOCIAZIONI CRISTIANE LAVORATORI ITALIANI-ACLI, CITTADINANZATTIVA-ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP NETWORK, CIVICO EUROPA, COLLEGAMENTO ITALIANO DI LOTTA ALLA POVERTA'-CILAP, CONFEDERAZIONE ITALIANA AGRICOLTORI-CIA, DEMOCRACY INTERNATIONAL, ECIT FOUNDATION, EUDEM, EUMANS, EUROPA ECOLOGIA, EUROPE AMBITION 2030, EUROPE'S PEOPLE'S FORUM, EUROPEAN ANTI POVERTY NETWORK-NEDERLAND, EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR LOCAL DEMOCRACY-ALDA, EUROPEAN EXPRESSION, EUROPEAN FUTURE FORUM, EUROPEAN PARTNERS FOR ENVIRONMENT-EPE, FEDERALISTES D'ESQUERRES, FEDERAZIONE ITALIANA INSEGNANTI DI SCUOLA MEDIA-FNISM, FONDAZIONE A.J. ZANINONI, FONDAZIONE BENVENUTI IN ITALIA, FONDAZIONE ROMA EUROPEA, FORUM ITALO-TUNISINO PER LA CITTADINANZA EURO-MEDITERRANEA, GIOVENTU' FEDERALISTA EUROPEA-GFE, INFOCIVICA, ISTITUTO DI STUDI SUL FEDERALISMO E L'UNITA EUROPEA PARIDE BACCARINI, LEGA DELLE AUTONOMIE LOCALI-ALI, LEGAMBIENTE, MAGISTRATS EUROPÉENS POUR LA DÉMOCRATIE ET LES LIBERTÉS-MEDEL, MOVIMENTO FEDERALISTA EUROPEO-MFE, NEW EUROPEANS, ONEDEMOS.EU, +EUROPA, PROGETTO DOMANI: CULTURA E SOLIDARIETÀ – PRO.DO.C.S., RADICALI ITALIANI, RETE PER LA DEMOCRAZIA LIBERALE, SAUVONS L'EUROPE, SCIENCE FOR DEMOCRACY, SINDNOVA, STIFTUNG FRIEDLICHE REVOLUTION, THE LAND BEYOND GREEK NGO, VOLT ITALIA

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