

Opinion on the Conference on the Future of Europe

The Committee on Constitutional Affairs,

- having regard to its resolutions of 16 February 2017 on improving the functioning of the European Union building on the potential of the Lisbon Treaty, of 16 February 2017 on possible evolutions of and adjustments to the current institutional set-up of the European Union, of 16 February 2017 on budgetary capacity for the euro area, and of 13 February 2019 on the state of the debate on the future of Europe,
 - having regard to the remarks by the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, following the informal meeting of the 27 Heads of States or government on 23 February 2018¹,
 - Having regard to the Meseberg declaration by the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, and the Chancellor of Germany, Angela Merkel, of 19 June 2018²,
 - having regard to the Franco-German non-paper on key questions and guidelines on the Conference on the Future of Europe,
 - having regard to Rule 132 of its Rules of Procedure and to its Annex VI, Point 18, establishing AFCO's exclusive competence for all matters related to the institutional aspects of the European integration process,
- A. whereas a commitment to discuss, besides other priorities, the institutional ideas contained in Parliament's resolutions on the Future of Europe in the Conference on the Future of Europe is of utmost importance for the Committee on Constitutional Affairs;
- B. whereas the voter turnout at the 2019 European Parliament elections increased, demonstrating increasing citizen engagement and interest;
- C. whereas the President of the European Commission proposed in her political guidelines for the next European Commission 2019-2024 the organisation of a Conference on the Future of Europe, with a clear scope and objectives agreed between the Parliament, the Council and the Commission, in order to give a say to the citizens; whereas the European Parliament as the only directly elected European institution by European citizens should have a leading role in this Conference;
- D. whereas the committees in the European Parliament should be consulted during the work of the Conference in their respective fields of competence;
- E. whereas the timeframe proposed by the President of the European Commission would entail the start of the Conference in early 2020 and the delivery of its first results on a new push for European democracy by coming forward with proposals improving the lead

¹ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/european-council/2018/02/23>

² <https://archiv.bundesregierung.de/archiv-de/meta/startseite/meseberg-declaration-1140806>

candidate system and addressing the issue of transnational lists in time for the next European elections in 2024;

- F. whereas there is a need to tackle both the internal and external challenges that the Union is facing, as well as new societal and transnational challenges which were not entirely foreseen at the time of the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty, including those identified by the President of the European Commission in her Six Priorities; whereas the number of important crises that the Union underwent demonstrate that reform processes are needed in multiple governance areas;
 - G. whereas this Conference is an occasion to closely involve citizens in a process that will lead to proposals for concrete institutional and constitutional reforms to render the European Union stronger, more democratic, more efficient, more transparent, with a greater capacity to act and to serve the general interest;
 - H. whereas the principle of European integration since the creation of the European Economic Community in 1957, and subsequently reconfirmed by all heads of state and government as well as all national parliaments of Member States during each round of successive integration and changes to the treaties has always been the creation of an “ever closer union”;
 - I. whereas the 70th anniversary of the Schuman Declaration on 9 May 2020 can provide further impetus to the Conference;
1. Welcomes the proposal for a Conference on the Future of Europe and believes that, ten years after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, it is an appropriate time to give European citizens a renewed opportunity to have a profound debate on the future of Europe, so as to shape the Union that we want to live in together;
 2. Believes that the Conference is also an opportunity to identify what the EU does well and what new measures it needs to do better, to increase its capacity to act and to make it more democratic; considers that its aim should be to engage directly with citizens in a meaningful dialogue through a bottom-up approach and is of the opinion that, in the long run, a permanent mechanism for engaging with the citizens in the reflection on the future of Europe should be envisaged;
 3. Stresses the fact that the Conference must go beyond an inter-institutional discussion; believes that in order to ensure a broad consultation and balanced participation there should be an inclusive approach based on age, gender, socio-economic diversity, and geographic balance in different pillars, of Members of the European Parliament, Members of national parliaments, the European Commission, the Council, civil society, social partners and citizens;
 4. Considers that the Committee of Regions, the European Economic and Social Committee and other EU bodies as well as all levels of governance should be included in this process;

5. Believes that citizens' participation to the Conference should be organised in a way that respects representativity in order to ensure that the diversity of our societies is fully represented; believes that consultations should be organised using the most efficient, innovative and appropriate platforms, including online tools, reaching all parts of the EU, in order to guarantee that any citizen can have a say during the work of the Conference; believes that ensuring youth participation will be an essential part of the long-lasting impacts of the Conference;
6. Stresses that in order to ensure that citizens will be given a real and thorough opportunity to participate in equal conditions as the institutional representatives, there is the need to provide an extra support to citizens through preparatory sessions, material and support from well-established and experienced Civil Society Organisations and other experts; considers that to engage citizens as much as possible an intensive communication campaign will be required;
7. Is of the opinion that the Conference, whose concept, structure, timing and scope should be decided jointly by European Parliament, the Commission and the Council in an inter-institutional agreement, shall enable an open dialogue and have a mandate to identify and discuss a wide range of topics and policy areas that are of major importance for the future of Europe in the 21st century and represent core concerns for EU citizens, without a predetermined outcome and without limiting the scope to some pre-defined policy priorities, in order to ensure a genuine bottom-up approach;
8. Considers, therefore, that the Conference should be focused on fostering the EU's capacity to act, identifying key legal and institutional obstacles preventing more effective EU action and proposing remedies; suggests that at least the following topics should be discussed in the framework of the Conference: European values, fundamental rights and freedoms, the democratic and institutional aspects of the European Union, environmental challenges and climate crisis, social justice and equality, economic issues including taxation, digital transformation, security and the role of the EU in the world;
9. Underlines that the above-mentioned list is not exhaustive and that the discussions should be organised in a way that is flexible enough to allow citizens to prioritize topics in the different thematic areas; suggests that special Eurobarometer surveys are used to support agenda setting and the debates in the framework of the Conference;
10. Believes that the Conference should take stock of the initiatives used in the run-up to the 2019 elections; believes that, in order to prepare well in advance the next European elections in 2024, the work on improving the lead candidate system and on the issue of transnational lists should take place during the Conference taking into account existing deadlines by working with all inter-institutional, political and legislative tools available;
11. Considers that the size of the Conference should be commensurate with the aim of ensuring a broad participation and representation of the Union's diversity while at the same time guaranteeing the effectiveness and efficiency of its work; considers that the Conference could include setting up thematic committees and plenary sittings and meetings that gather regularly enough to deliver concrete proposals;

12. Offers to host the Conference on the premises of the European Parliament, however activities of the Conference should also take place in all Member States including outside of their capitals; commits to ensure transparency of its work by web-streaming meetings and by publishing all relevant documents at the latest shortly after their debate in the Conference or its bodies; offers human resources to support the working of the Conference;
13. Believes that the credibility of the Conference and its political legitimacy derives from its capacity to go beyond a mere listening or dialogue exercise, to initiate real change and produce tangible proposals;
14. Proposes to insert into the IIA that the three EU Institutions commit to a genuine follow-up of the Conference without delay, with appropriate legislative proposals, initiating treaty change or otherwise;
15. Commits itself, if the Conference comes forward with a proposal to change the EU treaties, to initiate a revision of the Treaties as foreseen in Article 48 (TEU);
16. Calls on a general commitment from all participants to the Conference to ensure a proper follow-up of its outcome, each of them in accordance with their respective role and competences;
17. Suggests to propose without delay to the Commission and to the Council a draft inter-institutional agreement on the objectives, concept, structure, governance, scope, timeframe and format of the Conference on the Future of Europe based on Parliament's resolution; supports, to this aim, the proposal of the President of the European Commission that the position of the Chair of the Conference should be given to a Member of the European Parliament.