

# After Corona: We need a more powerful Europe

European solidarity during the Corona crisis does exist: intensive care patients are distributed to hospitals all over Europe, medical protective equipment is ordered together, the lifting of measures aiming to contain the spread of the virus is coordinated at a European level.

But still European cooperation and solidarity leaves much to be desired. Some Member States are still blocking a strong, solidarity-based response to the coming economic crisis. They reject corona bonds, thereby repeating mistakes that have already made the Euro crisis unnecessarily long and painful. This has given rise to populism and euro critics. In Italy, the number of euro-sceptics rose by 20 percent with the onset of the current crisis. It is the immediate result of a feeling of being left alone.

In the coming months we will have to ask ourselves one question: Has Europe found the right answers to this crisis?

We need - now more than ever - a debate on the future of the EU. We need to analyse why, as the first reflex to the crisis, national rather than European responses were the most popular. And we must finally translate existing European solidarity and the desire of the citizens for more Europe into political processes.

The Conference on the Future of the EU is the ideal forum for this debate.

## **Conference to start as soon as possible**

The European Parliament has already taken the necessary steps for this to happen. On Friday, the Parliament in its Corona Resolution also called for the Conference to start as soon as possible. Already in January a strong position was adopted, which now has to be negotiated with the Commission and the Council.

EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and Council President Charles Michel also made references to the conference in their speeches in the Parliament on Thursday. Michel called on the EU to talk to its citizens about more solidarity and unity. Ursula von der Leyen quoted from the Ventotene Manifesto, the 'founding document' of the European federalists: "The moment has arrived in which we must know how to discard old burdens, how to be ready for the new world that is coming, that will be so different from what we have imagined."

## **Initiative of the Federalists**

I totally agree with them. For this reason I wrote a letter to the President of the European Parliament, David Sassoli, on Friday, together with Guy Verhofstadt and Members of all pro-European groups in the European Parliament. We call for the Conference to start immediately after travel restrictions in Europe have been lifted. We should then not only discuss Corona and our health systems, as proposed this week by the responsible Commissioner Dubravka Suica. We need a fundamental response to the democratic, economic, social and climate challenges of

our time. It is time to start a broad European debate on this - together with the European citizens.

### **Background - 1 European Parliament position on the Future of the EU conference**

The resolution adopted today by the European Parliament:

*The European Parliament...*

*55. Stresses that the Union must be prepared to start an in-depth reflection on how to become more effective and democratic and that the current crisis only adds to the urgency of it; believe that the planned **Conference on the Future of Europe** is the appropriate forum for this; is therefore of the opinion that the Conference needs to start at the first opportunity and that it has to come forward with clear proposals, including by engaging directly with citizens, to profoundly reform the European Union, making it more effective, united, democratic, sovereign and resilient;*

### **Background - 2 Commissioner Dubravka Suica interviewed by the Financial Times**

<https://www.ft.com/content/b7fd7f3c-e97b-4d96-870e-907cef8985d1>

### **Background - 3 Letter of the pro-Europeans in the European Parliament to David Sassoli**

Dear President,

During the last weeks, our fight against the impact of the COVID-19 has rightly taken our attention away from the planned Conference on the Future of Europe. However, the crisis also shows that the Conference is now more necessary than ever. This was also alluded to by Charles Michel and Ursula von der Leyen in yesterday's plenary debate. With a global recession on the horizon, Europe is at a turning point. The crisis demonstrates again, that many challenges require a European response and we need an ambitious dialogue with citizens about our future.

Today's COVID-19 resolution makes clear references to the need of such a process of reflection and the need to engage directly with the EU's citizens. Parliament's position, adopted on 15 January, stressed that high-level patronage from the Presidents of the European Parliament, of the European Council and of the European Commission is needed. As Members of the former Working Group on the Conference we feel deeply dedicated to this initiative and therefore would like to propose that you - together with the two other presidents – reflect on a possible joint action on or around 9 May - the 70th anniversary of the Schuman Declaration.

This symbolic day might be the right moment to publicly relaunch a new perspective when the Conference could start. Even if a slight delay in the timeline is inevitable, the three institutions should pledge to start the Conference at a commonly agreed date in the very near future.

For such commitment to be made on the 9 May, it is crucial that the Council adopts its position on the Conference as soon as possible. We are convinced that it would be very helpful if you could reach out to the Croatian Presidency and reiterate, as you have already done in the past, that the Parliament would like to start the negotiations among the three institutions. A joint position before the summer is crucial so that logistical arrangements can be made for the conference and citizens agoras to start in late 2020 or early 2021. The slight delay should be used to ensure that this innovative and ambitious endeavour is properly prepared.

We remain at your disposal for any support or feedback you might need.

Sincerely yours,

Paulo Rangel  
Gabriele Bischoff  
Guy Verhofstadt  
Daniel Freund  
Helmut Scholz

18/04/2020

## **COVID-19: Addressing the crisis, reshaping Europe beyond the unthinkable**

Brussels, Friday 17th April 2020

The European Federalists welcome the resolution approved today by the European Parliament with a set of proposals for the European Union to address with united and determined actions the COVID-19 crisis and its immense economic and social impact. The European Parliament's proposals significantly raise the level of ambition of the deal proposed by the Eurogroup last week, in particular with respect to the creation of a new Recovery Fund funded by European Recovery Bonds issued by the European Union and guaranteed by the EU budget to support the European economy and cohesion among member states and citizens. The European Parliament is showing leadership in supporting an ambitious deal by the European Council next week. We now expect the same leadership from President von der Leyen - who yesterday said that in this time of important choices she takes inspiration from Altiero Spinelli, one of the founders of the federalist movement - and from the leaders in the European Council. At the same time, the European Parliament should open a reflection on how to move from addressing the emergency to reshaping the European Union in a way that it has the means and powers to stand future crisis.

Sandro Gozi, President of the Union of European Federalists, stated: "The Recovery Fund is a new crucial tool to enable the European Union to help re-building our economies devastated by the crisis. The European Recovery Bonds, issued by the European Union, as proposed by the European Parliament today, are the only way to make available fresh resources of the size that the US and China are deploying for their economies. We trust that the European Council next week will adopt these proposals and make the Fund and the Recovery Bonds operational as soon as possible. At the same time, we need to reflect seriously on the European Union itself. President Macron is right: the European Union can't keep moving from crisis to crisis, every time inventing new European instruments, often after bitter divisions among national governments that reverberate through our societies. We need structural solutions that make the European Union able to act fast, to mobilise its own resources rapidly when they are needed for European actions, and without burdening member states, as in every federal structure: European funds, for European common goods, managed by the European level. His call in the interview on the Financial Times yesterday must be taken up by the EU member states and all EU institutions, starting from the European Parliament: we really must address the future of the European project "thinking the unthinkable".

It is time to address the knot of the European Union as a true political union, breaking taboos that have blocked further European integration in the past decade. The European Parliament should take the lead proposing to revitalise the project of a Conference on the Future of Europe and fast track its outcome to produce a new constitutional pact for a federal Europe with its own financial autonomy.



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## TEXTS ADOPTED

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### **P9\_TA(2020)0010**

#### **European Parliament's position on the Conference on the Future of Europe**

#### **European Parliament resolution of 15 January 2020 on the European Parliament's position on the Conference on the Future of Europe (2019/2990(RSP))**

*The European Parliament,*

- 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<sup>1</sup>, of 16 February 2017 on possible evolutions of and adjustments to the current institutional set-up of the European Union<sup>2</sup>, of 16 February 2017 on budgetary capacity for the euro area<sup>3</sup>, and of 13 February 2019 on the state of the debate on the future of Europe<sup>4</sup>,
  - having regard to the proposal by the President-Designate of the Commission Ursula von der Leyen of 16 July 2019 in the framework of the political guidelines for the next European Commission 2019-2024 and the organisation of a Conference on the Future of Europe (the ‘Conference’),
  - having regard to the European Council conclusions of 12 December 2019 on the general approach to the Conference on the Future of Europe,
  - having regard to the opinion in letter form of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs of 9 December 2019 on the organisation of the Conference on the Future of Europe,
  - having regard to the outcome of the meeting of 19 December 2019 of the working group of the Conference of Presidents on the Conference on the Future of Europe,
  - having regard to Rule 132(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas voter turnout increased at the 2019 European Parliament elections, demonstrating growing citizen engagement and interest in the European integration process, as well as an expectation that Europe will address its current and future challenges;
- B. whereas there is a need to tackle both the internal and external challenges that Europe is facing, as well as the new societal and transnational challenges which had not been fully

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<sup>1</sup> OJ C 252, 18.7.2018, p. 215.

<sup>2</sup> OJ C 252, 18.7.2018, p. 201.

<sup>3</sup> OJ C 252, 18.7.2018, p. 235.

<sup>4</sup> Texts adopted, P8\_TA(2019)0098.

envisaged when the Lisbon Treaty was adopted; whereas the number of significant crises that the Union has undergone demonstrates that reform processes are needed in multiple governance areas;

- C. whereas the principle of European integration since the creation of the European Economic Community in 1957, 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 among the peoples of Europe’;
- D. whereas there is a consensus that the mandate of a Conference on the Future of Europe should be a process with a duration of two years, work thereon commencing preferably on Schuman Day, 9 May 2020 (the 70th anniversary of the Schuman Declaration), with a view to completion thereof by summer 2022;
- E. whereas this Conference process should be an occasion to closely involve EU citizens in a bottom-up exercise in which they are listened to and their voices contribute to the debates on the future of Europe;
- F. whereas the European Parliament is the only EU institution that is directly elected by EU citizens and should have a leading role in this Conference process;

### ***Objective and scope of the Conference***

1. Welcomes the proposal for a Conference on the Future of Europe and believes that, 10 years after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, it is an appropriate time to give EU citizens a renewed opportunity to have a robust 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 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 adopt a bottom-up approach to engaging directly with citizens in a meaningful dialogue, and is of the opinion that, in the long run, a permanent mechanism for engaging with the citizens in contemplating the future of Europe should be envisaged;
3. Is of the opinion that prior to the launch of the Conference process, a listening phase should be initiated to enable citizens from across the European Union to express their ideas, make suggestions and propose their own vision of what Europe means for them; proposes that the methodologies used to collect and process citizens’ inputs be uniform and consistent across all Member States and at EU level;
4. Believes that citizens’ participation in the Conference process should be organised in such a way 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, and should reach 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;
5. Underlines that the Conference process should be an open and transparent process that takes an inclusive, participatory and well-balanced approach to citizens and stakeholders; stresses that the involvement of citizens, organised civil society and a

range of stakeholders at European, national, regional and local level should be the key element of this innovative and original process;

6. Proposes that the Conference should be a process that is governed by a range of bodies with defined/ad hoc responsibilities, including institutional bodies and the direct involvement of citizens;
7. Proposes that the Conference Plenary should enable an open forum for discussions among the different participants without a predetermined outcome, while including input from Citizens' agoras and without limiting the scope to pre-defined policy fields or methods of integration; suggests that as a maximum, pre-defined but non-exhaustive policy priorities could be identified, such as:
  - European values, fundamental rights and freedoms,
  - Democratic and institutional aspects of the EU,
  - Environmental challenges and the climate crisis,
  - Social justice and equality,
  - Economic and employment issues including taxation,
  - Digital transformation,
  - Security and the role of the EU in the world;

underlines that this is a non-exhaustive set of policies that could serve as guidance for the Conference; suggests that special Eurobarometer surveys are used to support agenda setting and debates in the framework of the Conference process;

8. 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 for the next European elections in 2024, work on issues such as the lead candidate system and transnational lists should be taken into consideration during the Conference process, taking into account existing deadlines and working with all interinstitutional, political and legislative tools available;

### ***Organisation, composition and governance of the Conference process***

9. Proposes that the Conference be composed of a range of bodies with diverse responsibilities, such as: a Conference Plenary, Citizens' agoras, Youth agoras, a Steering Committee and an Executive Coordination Board; requests that all bodies at all levels of the Conference should be gender-balanced;
10. Proposes that several thematic Citizens' agoras reflecting the policy priorities should be held throughout the Conference process, and that they should be composed of a maximum of 200-300 citizens with a minimum of three per Member State, calculated in accordance with the principle of degressive proportionality; stresses that they should be held in different locations across the Union and must be representative (in terms of geography, gender, age, socio-economic background and/or level of education);



11. Proposes further that the selection of participating citizens from among all EU citizens be made randomly by independent institutions in Member States in accordance with the above-mentioned criteria, and that criteria be defined to guarantee that elected politicians, senior government representatives and professional interest representatives cannot participate in Citizens' agoras; calls for the Citizens' agoras to have different participants in the different locations, whereas each individual thematic Citizens' agora must be composed of the same participants at each of its meetings in order to ensure coherence and consistency; insists on a minimum of two meetings of each thematic Citizens' agora in order to provide input for the Conference Plenary and receive global feedback on the deliberations in another meeting in dialogue format; underlines that Citizens' agoras should seek to find agreement by consensus and, where this is not possible, a minority opinion can be voiced;
12. Proposes that, in addition to the Citizens' agora, at least two Youth agoras be held: one at the beginning of the Conference and one towards the end, as young people deserve their own forum because young generations are the future of Europe and it is they who will be most affected by any decision taken today on the future direction of the EU; calls for the age of participants to be set at between 16 and 25 and for the selection, size, status and working methods to be based on the same criteria as those used for the Citizens' agora;
13. Requests that arrangements be made to ensure that all citizens (including young people) participating in the Conference process are assisted in terms of reimbursing their travel and accommodation costs and, where appropriate, arranging for authorised leave of absence from their workplace and compensation for social costs (e.g. loss of income, day-care and special arrangements for disabled persons);
14. Calls for the membership of the Conference Plenary to be constituted by:
  - the European Parliament representing the Union's citizens with a maximum of 135 members,
  - the Council representing the Member States with 27 members,
  - the national parliaments with between two and four members per Member State parliament,
  - the European Commission, represented by the three corresponding Commissioners,
  - the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions with four members each,
  - the EU-level social partners with two members per side;
15. Stresses that in order to guarantee the feedback loop, representatives from the thematic Citizens' and Youth agora will be invited to the Conference Plenary in order to present and discuss their conclusions so that these can be taken into account during the deliberation in the Conference plenary;
16. Insists that Council representation must be at ministerial level and that representatives from the European Parliament and the national parliaments should ensure balanced

political representation reflecting their respective diversity; underlines that the institutional parties of the Conference will participate as equal partners and that strict parity will be ensured between the European Parliament, on the one hand, and the Council and national parliaments, on the other; insists that a consensus be sought on the recommendations of the Conference Plenary or, at a minimum, that the recommendations represent the views of the majority of representatives of each of the three EU institutions and of the national parliaments;

17. Proposes that the Conference meet in plenary session at least twice per semester at the European Parliament; suggests that, at its first meeting, the Conference Plenary adopt a working plan and that, after each meeting of the Conference Plenary, a plenary report with conclusions and working group reports be made available to the Conference participants and the general public; is of the opinion that final conclusions should be adopted at the final meeting of the Conference Plenary, summarising the outcome of the Conference process as a whole;
18. Stresses the need to provide support through preparatory sessions and from well-established and experienced civil society organisations and other experts; acknowledges the importance of the expertise of NGOs, universities, research centres and think tanks across Europe and invites them to support the Conference process at the various levels and provide support for the various bodies;
19. Believes that the Conference should seek ways of involving representatives of the EU candidate countries in discussions on the future of Europe;
20. Is of the opinion that a high-level patronage should be ensured by the three main EU institutions at the highest level, namely by the Presidents of the European Parliament, of the European Council and of the European Commission; believes that this high-level patronage should guarantee the process and provide for its oversight all as well as kick off the Conference process;
21. Is of the opinion that, in order to ensure efficient guidance of the process as a whole and for all bodies concerned, governance of the Conference process should be ensured by a Steering Committee and an Executive Coordination Board;
22. Proposes that the Steering Committee should consist of:
  - representatives of Parliament (all political groups represented as well as a representative of the Constitutional Affairs Committee and a representative of the European Parliament Bureau),
  - representatives of the Council (EU Presidencies),
  - representatives of the Commission (three Commissioners responsible);calls for the composition of the Steering Committee to ensure political and institutional balance and for all of the components of the Steering Committee to have equal weight;
23. Is of the opinion that the Steering Committee should be responsible for the preparation of the meetings of the Conference Plenary (drafting agendas, plenary reports and conclusions) as well as the Citizens' and Youth agoras and the oversight of the activities and organisation of the Conference process;

24. Proposes further that the Executive Coordination Board be composed of the three main EU institutions under Parliament's leadership; insists that members of the Executive Coordination Board be part of the Steering Committee; recommends that the Board be responsible for the daily management of the Conference process, in particular the practical organisation of the Conference, working groups, the Citizens' agoras and any other initiative determined by the Steering Committee;
25. Proposes that the Conference process be assisted by a secretariat whose members should be drawn from the three main EU institutions;

### ***Conference process communication and political memorandum***

26. Is of the opinion that communication with citizens, the participation of citizens in the Conference process and the work and outcome of the Conference is of paramount importance; stresses that all existing and new communication tools for digital and physical participation should be coordinated among the three institutions, starting with Parliament's existing resources and the European Parliament Liaison Offices (EPLOs), so that citizens can keep abreast of the Conference process throughout and follow proceedings once the plenary sessions and Citizens' and Youth agoras have begun;
27. Is of the opinion that all Conference meetings (including plenary meetings and Citizens' and Youth agora) should be web-streamed and open to the public; insists that all documents pertaining to the Conference should be published, including contributions from stakeholders, and that all proceedings should take place in the official languages of the Union;
28. Is of the opinion that the Conference process, its concept, structure, timing and scope should be agreed jointly by Parliament, the Commission and the Council in a memorandum of understanding;

### ***Output***

29. Calls for the Conference to produce concrete recommendations that will need to be addressed by the institutions and turned into actions in order to meet the expectations of citizens and stakeholders after a two-year process and debate;
30. Calls for a general commitment from all participants in the Conference to ensure a proper follow-up of its outcome, each in accordance with their respective role and competencies;
31. Commits itself to a genuine follow-up of the Conference without delay, with legislative proposals, initiating treaty change or otherwise; calls on the other two institutions to make the same commitment;
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32. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the President of the Commission, the President of the European Council and the presidency in office of the Council.