

BRIEFING NOTE ON THE CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

(1) The conference on the future of Europe: Institutional citizen outreach or a new momentum for a constitutional convention?

- In March 2019, President Macron proposed to organise by 2020, together “with the representatives of the European institutions and the Member States, **a Conference for Europe in order to propose all the changes our political project needs**”; in order “to chart together the road to European renewal”.
- After her election by the European Parliament in July 2019, Ursula von der Leyen expressed her commitment to the discussion and debate on the future of Europe. She also confirmed the Conference on the future of Europe will be organised by the European institutions and that citizens should “have their say at a Conference on the Future of Europe, to start in 2020 and run for two years”.
- To date, the composition, working method and mandate of the Conference remain largely unclear. Only the political guidelines and mission letters of President-elect von der Leyen and the answers of Commissioner-designate Suica in front of the European Parliament can give indications.
- The last point of her guidelines is the strengthening of our democracy. In this section, the call for a Conference on the future of Europe represents a key aspects of her approach to European Renewal.
- In her Mission letter to Dubravka Suica, von der Leyen stated that “we need a Conference on the Future of Europe, to start in 2020 and run for two years. [Which] should bring together citizens of all ages from across our Union, **as well as civil society** and European institutions”.
- Furthermore, President-elect gave Suica three concrete tasks: (1) To work closely with the European Parliament and the Council **to agree on the concept, structure, timing and scope of the Conference**; (2) To **ensure the widest possible participation in the Commission’s Citizens’** and (3) To work closely with the VP for Interinstitutional Relations and Foresight and the VP for Values and Transparency **to ensure the follow-up on what is agreed by the Conference**.
- The initial answers of the responsible Commissioner-designate Dubravka Suica to the written confirmation hearing questions indicate that the EP should play a leading role and Council and Commission should be involved. There should also be opportunities for the institutions to engage with citizens and civil society organisations (CSOs), but it remains unclear whether this is happening as a “side-event” to the conference or whether citizens and CSOs should be directly involved in the conference. As regards the scope and objective of the conference, Suica sets out that the Conference should “lead to a concrete outcome” including on improvements of the lead candidate system and the introduction of transnational lists (TNLs). Suica does not rule out that the conference might lead to treaty revision under Art. 48 TEU. During her hearing Commissioner-designate Suica set out that the conference should amongst other topics deal with the improvement of the lead candidate system and discuss the introduction of transnational lists.
- At the moment there is great uncertainty on the mandate, composition, timing and working method of the proposed Conference. The European Parliament has not a formal position yet. The European Commission is considering different options. Many of these matters will be settled in the next few months and there is still considerable room to influence the outcome. This is a clear invitation to be an active part of the first stages of this conference in shaping its concept, structure, timing and scope.
- We believe that it is very important for European civil society organisations to be aware of these developments, assess the interest and expectations of our organisations in respect of the Conference, and start reflecting on how to influence its developments from the very beginning.

(2) Key questions to be answered:

Options for the mandate/objectives of the Conference for Europe:

Currently three different mandates with varying levels of ambition are under discussion:

a) “A constitutional conference”

The conference is tasked with a broad mandate to consider legislative, policy and institutional changes. The starting point is which policy areas should be considered European public goods, which form of institutional architecture is required for an efficient and democratic governance of those policy areas and which financial resources on the European level are required to deliver on those areas.

The conference is either to make abstract recommendations on those issues to a new European Convention or to work up a concrete proposal for a new (Constitutional) Treaty to be submitted to the European Council by the European Parliament along the requirements of Art. 48 TEU.

b) The “open model”

The conference is to make proposals for the improvement of the lead candidate system and to discuss the introduction of TNLs. In a separate work stream the conference is to “listen to citizens’ views on Europe”, including on “future topics” such as demographic developments. The outcome might include suggestions for treaty changes.

c) “Citizen Dialogues 2.0”

The conference is designed as a platform for exchange between citizens, CSOs and representatives from the European institutions (EP, Council, Commission) and should inform the thinking of the institutions. The conference is concluded with a summary of the most pertinent issues discussed.

Options for the composition of the Conference for Europe:

a) Conference to mirror a European Convention with citizen and CSO side-events

The Conference is composed of representatives of EP, EC, national governments and national parliaments, mirroring a European Convention. In addition to the “core conference” there may be shadow conferences composed of CSO representatives or randomly selected citizens to make recommendations. The “core conference” is organising hearings with CSO representatives (and citizens).

b) Conference as an “adjusted convention” with citizen and CSO side-events

The conference is composed of representatives of EP, EC and a reduced number of national representatives when compared to the convention setup so as to allow for more ambitious proposals to be submitted to the Council as a negotiation point. There are shadow conferences and hearings with CSO representatives (and citizens).

c) Mixed setup of European institution and CSOs/citizens

The conference is composed along the principles of a) or b) and complemented with CSO representatives or randomly selected citizens.

d) Citizens or CSO Assembly

The conference is composed as an assembly of CSOs or randomly selected citizens, or both, and steered by a Presidium of representatives from the institutions.

e) The conference does not consist of a standing body but is a series of events.

HOW DO WE THINK CSOs SHOULD BE INVOLVED?

HOW SHOULD PARTICIPATING CSOs BE SELECTED?

CITIZENS OR CSOs?

WHAT IS THE BEST FORMAT OF THESE MEETINGS?

WHAT SHOULD BE THE OBEJECTIVE?

READING LIST

- U. von der Leyen, Political guidelines for the next European Commission (2019-2024): "[A Union that strives for more: My agenda for Europe](#)"
- [Communication - A Europe that delivers: Institutional options for making the European Union's work more efficient](#), COM (2018) 95 final, European Commission, 14 February 2018.
- "[The hour of European Sovereignty](#)", Annual State of the EU address by President Juncker at the European Parliament, *State of the Union 2018*.
- [Online consultation on the Future of Europe Interim report](#), European Commission, December 2018.
- "[For a Federal Europe: Sovereign, Democratic and Social](#)", *UEF Manifesto for the 2019 European Parliament elections*.