

Conference on the Future of Europe – Council agrees its position



Member states want the Conference on the Future of Europe to get citizens involved in a wide-ranging debate on Europe's future in the coming decade and beyond, including in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Meeting at the level of ambassadors today, they agreed the Council's position on the arrangements for the conference, which paves the way for the opening of discussions on this topic with the Commission and the European Parliament.

In its mandate, the Council takes the view that the conference should be launched as soon as the epidemiological conditions allow for it. It should focus on how to develop EU policies over the medium and long term in order to tackle more effectively the challenges facing Europe, including the economic repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic and lessons learned from the crisis.

The Council also stresses the need to involve a wide range of citizens and stakeholders in the process. It suggests building on the citizens' dialogues and consultations which have taken place across Europe and which have fed into the development of the EU's Strategic Agenda for 2019-2024.

Member States want to encourage the active participation of citizens in the Conference on the Future of Europe, which has become all the more relevant following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. We need an open and inclusive debate across Europe about the future priorities of the EU and concrete solutions on how to emerge stronger and more resilient from the current crisis. This broad dialogue with citizens and various other stakeholders will help guide the way ahead, contributing to a joint vision of the direction the EU should take in the next decade and beyond.

Andreja Metelko-Zgombić, Croatian State Secretary for European Affairs

Some of the Council's proposals for the organisation of the conference include focussing discussions around a set of topics, broad enough to provide sufficient scope for all participants to provide input. The conference would also address cross-cutting issues related to the way the EU delivers on its policy objectives.

The effective involvement of citizens and stakeholders should be ensured through debates, including at national and regional level, and through multilingual internet platforms and citizens' panels in member states and at European level. Digital engagement efforts and activities would be of key importance, especially in the event of restrictions related to COVID-19, while physical participation and face-to-face exchanges should remain an

essential part of the conference, according to the Council's mandate.

As regards governance, the Council wants to ensure an equal role for the three EU institutions, respect for each institution's prerogatives and the close association of national parliaments. It suggests that the conference could be placed under the authority of an eminent European personality, selected by the three EU institutions, as its independent and single chair.

The Council also considers that the EU framework offers potential to allow challenges to be addressed in an effective manner and notes that the conference does not fall under Article 48 of the Treaty on the European Union, which lays down the procedures for treaty amendments. It takes the view that the outcome of the conference should be reflected in a report to the European Council in 2022, to be followed up effectively by the EU institutions in the light of the guidance received from the EU leaders.