

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE SET UP OF THE CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE BY 12 EUROPEAN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

The following recommendations for a successful Conference on the Future of Europe have emerged as outcome of a series of brainstorming sessions between European civil society organisations in Autumn 2019. While this is a consensual proposal to the European institutions, not all aspects are necessarily supported by all representatives. The following organisations are represented:

European Students' Forum (AEGEE), European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA), Assembly of European Regions (AER), Civil Society Europe (CSE), Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the EU (COMECE), European Citizen Action Service (ECAS), European Youth Forum, Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, Fondation EURACTIV, garagErasmus Foundation, Young European Federalists (JEF) and the Union of European Federalists (UEF).

The Conference on the Future of Europe presents an important opportunity to strengthen the democratic quality of the discussion on the future of Europe and a possibility to unlock useful reforms of the EU. However, the success of the Conference will strictly depend on several factors, including the clear interinstitutional agreement on the objectives of the Conference, the composition, the methods used and the final impact of the proposals of the Conference.

1. Mandate and goals of the Conference

We recommend giving the Conference an open mandate to make all recommendations it deems necessary or desirable to tackle the challenges with which the Union is confronted. This includes legislative and policy recommendations, proposals relating to the scope of competences of the Union, the financing of Union policies and proposals for the democratic and efficient governance of those policies, including where those proposals require treaty change or a new treaty framework. Without an open mandate for clear proposals and structured involvement of citizens and civil society, the Conference is likely to replicate existing and inconclusive forms of citizen engagement, such as the Citizens' Dialogues, and be reduced to a communication exercise, which will lead to increased citizen's distrust.

2. Composition of the conference

The Conference should ensure wide participation and deep deliberation with citizens and civil society from across the Union, as well as accession candidate and eastern neighbourhood countries. In order to avoid that the Conference replicates previous listening exercises (Citizens' Dialogues 2.0) the setup must be geared towards concrete and relevant results, ready for adoption by the institutions. This requires that the composition of the conference respects the principle of representative democracy and gives decision-making power only to members with formal democratic legitimisation. We recommend a composition modelled on the constitutional convention, including all EU institutions and national parliaments, while civil society organisations should be given an observer status.

3. Methodology and process (see in detail in the attachment provided by ECAS)

We recommend a multi-step and multi-stakeholder approach allowing for randomly selected citizens, and civil society organisations representing further citizens and their concerns to give input at different levels of expertise using digital tools and deliberative polling with final decision-making by the core conference composed of representatives from the EU institutions and national parliaments.

At a first stage the main challenges for the Union are identified in process led by the EU institutions with the close involvement of civil society organisations. Citizens are given the opportunity to feed in their demands and concerns through online tools and platforms, adding to the ready results of the previously held Citizens' consultations and dialogues. At the second stage randomly selected individual citizens and citizens representing civil society organisations are working up concrete proposals addressing those challenges, following the method of deliberative polling as introduced by Professor Fishkin. Those deliberative panels on different issues are to take place across the Union and for accession and Eastern partnership countries where accession and neighbourhood policies are concerned. Finally, the Conference debates the proposals on the basis of a "comply or explain" principle and works up proposals of their own addressing the challenges identified.

The process is supported by a wider effort for awareness-raising, including financing provided for civil society organisations allowing outreach to a wide range of citizens of different backgrounds, realities and ages.

4. Follow-up

The European Commission commits to deliver legislative proposals on all policy recommendations adopted by the Conference. The European Parliament commits to submit all proposals for treaty changes to the European Council according to Article 48 TEU, unless member states or a subgroup of member states commit to taking forward those proposals with a treaty outside of the Union framework.

ANNEX: Detailed proposals on methodology (provided by ECAS)

The process could follow a **divergent-convergent model** in order to include randomly selected citizens, and civil society organisations representing further citizens and their concerns, experts and institutional decision-makers in different phases and combining both online and offline methods. The goal is to ensure inclusiveness and transparency throughout the whole process and a broad participation to the Conference from all parts of society but with democratic mandate holders having a final say on how to concretely input the recommendations into policy-making. The process should also take into account the role of the whole public sphere including the media as an important pillar of democracy and therefore of its future.

5 Phases:

1) Preparation and Setting up – This fundamental preliminary step will include four main elements, to be carried out by the institutions in coordination with civil society organisations at EU level where relevant:

1. The clear, widespread communication at all levels on the objectives and process of the Conference, especially in order to manage people's expectations on the outcomes
2. The creation of common guidelines on how the process will be conducted (languages, tools, etc.) that should be applicable to all EU member states
3. The identification of human and financial resources (at EU and national levels) that will be decided upon and allocated in order to ensure success of the process – e.g. EU funding for local awareness raising projects, appointing civil society as intermediaries, universities to support the

process, etc. 4. The set-up of the infrastructure for the online and offline consultations that will be used in the next phases – e.g. crowdsourcing platforms, apps, etc.

2) Identification (divergent phase)

Who? All EU citizens and those from accession, candidate and Eastern Neighbourhood countries where relevant

How? Digital platforms (surveys, crowdsourcing, e-voting) accessible to individual citizens or to representatives following face to face meetings at different geographical levels.

– *When?* Ideally 8 months for collection

This phase will be open to receiving inputs from all citizens of EU member states and beyond where relevant, mainly by exploiting the potential of digital tools and platforms and the outreach and grassroots connections of civil society organisations in order to have the widest outreach possible in the most efficient way and removing obstacles caused by the digital divide.

In line with the objectives of the Conference, participating citizens and civil society organisations representing further citizens will be asked to submit their demands and concerns and to vote on priorities using user-friendly websites and mobile apps set-up during the preparation phase. The goal of this inclusive phase is to allow people to feel free to express their demands on issues that are not too technical (e.g. they would like to see the EU to have more competence on certain policies) or even to share the values that they would like to see better reflected in the current or future treaties.

Ideally the online platform should come from the EU and protect citizens' identification (if they are afraid their ideas will be held against them in their countries). There are many ways in which digital technologies can help the categorisation of ideas, to filter out spam, and allow for full transparency of the process. However, it is important to also consider the human resources necessary to go through the contributions once collected online.

3) Ideation (first convergent phase)

Who? Random representative samples of individual citizens, representatives of CSOs, experts – *How?* Deliberative polling – *When?* Ideally up to 8 months

This phase will use a method called *deliberative polling* (introduced by Professor Fishkin) - where randomly selected citizens broadly representative for the EU population and citizens representing civil society organisations, are invited to discuss ideas to address the issues identified in the first phase, to select the most relevant ones and to formulate recommendations. This will take the form of multiple face-to-face citizens' panels in different parts of the EU. CSOs and/or experts will be designated as moderators to guide the participants' thinking, encourage them to ask more questions and provide them with answers about the EU if necessary.

The process, discussions and results of these events should be transparent and documented on online platforms for other citizens to see them (still safeguarding the identity of the citizens involved). Financial resources must be taken into consideration as reimbursement of citizens' 'out of pocket' expenses including proven loss of earnings.

4) Evaluation (second convergent phase) and decision-making

Who? EU decision-makers (+ CSOs, experts) – *How?* Interinstitutional evaluation and decisions – *When?* Ideally up to 12 months

Depending on how clear the ideas of the third phase are, they can be assessed by citizens'/CSOs/expert/relevant stakeholders or directly by the decision-makers themselves.

If the recommendations from the third phase are still not concrete/conclusive enough, the evaluation can start from citizens/CSOs/experts through an online platform using simple evaluation methods (e.g. rating and comparison) which will allow each recommendation to be further analysed and graded.

Once the recommendations are clear, EU decision-makers will evaluate the proposals and decide how these proposals will lead to legislative, policy and institutional changes and/or Treaty changes. For this, decision-makers apply a “comply or explain” approach.

5) Feedback and Impact

The process must end with the EU’s clear communication to all citizens on what the impact of their contributions was and how the institutional actors have taken on the results.

It is important to also inform the citizens of all the phases of the process and to ask them for feedback on the process through a detailed survey. Furthermore, the EU should also envisage enough financial resources for an EU-wide informational campaign on the results – an important investment for future follow-up.