

# Conference on the Future of Europe: What worked, what now, what next?

## SUMMARY

When the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) was launched in 2021, there was no shortage of political promise. The unprecedented involvement of citizens, politicians and stakeholders in deliberations about Europe's future offered hope that the Conference could strengthen, deepen and rejuvenate EU democracy.

The grand rhetoric did little to overcome political realities and, at this point, critics claim that process-related problems and a lack of visibility have left the Conference in the doldrums. Yet there is still time for political interest to match the enthusiasm of the citizens actively engaged in the Conference and for this initiative to end with tangible results.

The final CoFoE phases must – and can – tackle the important concerns building up in terms of buy-in, organisation and legitimacy of the Conference, and the entire experiment with participatory democracy can add value to the ongoing efforts of reforming EU democracy. To that end, this report provides lessons for the future from the process so far (Part 1), suggests actionable results in the remaining phases (Part 2), and proposes new forms of citizens' participation in EU politics that build on past experience (Part 3).

More specifically, **Part 1** of the report examines the Conference up until now, focusing on the European

Citizens' Panels. A key part of the CoFoE's participatory dimension, these Panels are considered the most successful element of the process. However, the broadness of the themes, lack of time, weak links between transnational and (sub)national debates, and ambiguity of purpose emerge as lessons to be learned for similar future exercises.

**Part 2** offers five 'must-dos' which look at the upcoming phase, and argues for increasing the stakes of the Conference; giving citizens new opportunities before the end of the CoFoE process to exchange with their political representatives about their recommendations; boosting the transparency of the different elements of the process; translating citizens' recommendations into actionable proposals; and specifying the final path to and form of the CoFoE's outcome.

Lastly, in **Part 3**, the report puts forward four options on how to incorporate novel participatory elements in the democratic process: European citizens' deliberations on key legislative proposals; multilevel citizens' deliberations on major transformative topics; 'big tent' fora on the EU's strategic priorities; and European citizens' deliberations in conjunction with a European Convention. These ideas are non-exhaustive and can be combined to offer both top-down and bottom-up approaches to participatory democracy in the EU's decision-making process.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT/DISCLAIMER

This report is the result of exchanges within the Conference Observatory's High-Level Advisory Group (HLAG) under the co-chairmanship of Brigid Laffan and Herman Van Rompuy (see Annex 2). The Conference Observatory is a joint initiative by an international consortium comprising the Bertelsmann Stiftung, the European Policy Centre, the King Baudouin Foundation and Stiftung Mercator. It aims to observe, critically analyse and inspire deliberations on the Conference on the Future of Europe. As part of the Observatory, the HLAG accompanies and seeks to shape the Conference process and outcomes.

The contents and views expressed in this report reflect discussions among HLAG members and input provided by them, but do not necessarily represent the individual views of each member of the Group or the institutions they are affiliated with. The report has been drafted by the HLAG secretariat, which is composed of Janis A. Emmanouilidis, Theodora Famprikezi, Johannes Greubel, Dominik Hierlemann, Perle Petit, Georg E. Riekes and Corina Stratulat.

# Introduction

When the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) was launched in May 2021, there was no shortage of political promises: “The Conference is for all Europeans to debate a shared vision of what we want our Union to be”, declared Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. “We must listen to all voices [...] and ensure that we properly follow up on whatever is agreed.”<sup>1</sup> Her words spoke to the hopes of many Europeans that the Conference could strengthen, deepen and rejuvenate EU democracy by means of an unprecedented involvement of citizens, politicians and stakeholders in deliberations and decisions about Europe’s future.

However, this grand rhetoric did little to overcome political realities. From the onset, the Conference lacked a sense of purpose and strong commitment from all member states. EU institutions and the vast majority of EU countries had drastically different opinions about the ultimate objectives of the Conference. Most governments were critical of the overall idea, expressing fears that the endeavour would raise expectations that the Union and its members would not be willing nor able to fulfil. By initiating a debate about the ‘future of Europe’ without ensuring the support of all those involved, the Conference got off on the wrong foot.

Today, some ten months after its official launch, critics say that the Conference is in the doldrums. It has limited visibility, as most citizens are not even aware that it is taking place. Its [Multilingual Digital Platform](#) (MDP), albeit an innovative tool, has not generated widespread transnational discussions about the EU’s future. The link between national and European events is weak, and, to date, the Conference Plenaries have failed to generate excitement or a sense of collective endeavour.

## Infobox 1. What is the Conference on the Future of Europe?

The CoFoE is a major, first-of-its-kind debate forum for citizens on the EU’s key challenges and priorities for the future. Initiated by French President Emmanuel Macron and Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, this bottom-up exercise triggered a transnational, EU-wide debate with various stakeholders at all levels of European, national, regional and local governance, using innovative formats and covering pressing issues in different policy fields. The Conference was [launched](#) on 9 May 2021 as an interinstitutional effort of the European Commission, Parliament and Council.

Citizens are at the centre of this process. Several participatory elements have been put in place to help achieve that goal. Over one year, the Conference holds four [ECPs](#), and [events in all member states](#), as well as on the subnational level. In addition, the [MDP](#) provides EU citizens with the opportunity to make, endorse and discuss proposals for European reform in all official EU languages. The results are debated in a [Conference Plenary](#). The Plenary will, at the end of the process, adopt proposals, which will then be included in the final report by the [Executive Board](#).

Nevertheless, the enthusiasm of citizens actively engaged in the process has given the Conference a solid lifeline. As the CoFoE advances, there is hope that political interest and engagement will follow suit. The [European Citizens’ Panels](#) (ECPs) – an EU first in deliberative democracy at scale – have proven a strong asset. Four Panels made up of 200 randomly selected citizens from all 27 member states, reflecting the EU’s gender, age, geographic and socio-economic diversity, have come together to deliberate policy priorities for Europe’s future (see Infobox 1). While the ECP process had its flaws, so far, the experiment of adding participatory democracy to the Union’s representative set-up has been worthwhile and indicates what would be possible if institutions joined forces and were willing to develop EU democracy further.

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The ultimate success of the Conference hinges on the Union “[following] up on whatever is agreed.”<sup>2</sup> If this objective is not met, the EU would undermine the very rationale of the Conference and further widen the gap between citizens and politicians. Yet the road to final outcomes is still long. The next test is whether the citizens and political representatives participating in the Conference can make meaningful *joint* proposals on EU reform and concrete policies. In the upcoming phase, the Conference must successfully build on the momentum from the ECPs to arrive at tangible and actionable results. The conclusion of the Conference should also be the occasion to draw lessons from the ECPs for the future and reflect on new forms of citizens’ participation in EU politics.

This HLAG report makes proposals to that effect by focusing on the following three elements:

**Part 1: What worked?** Evaluation of the ECPs so far, including the flaws that must be addressed to successfully conclude the final sessions of the ECPs.

**Part 2: What now?** Must-dos for the final ‘hot’ phase of the Conference, when ECP deliberations, results from the MDP and national exercises converge in the Conference Plenary and Working Groups.

**Part 3: What next?** Potential options for the Union’s future participation toolbox on the basis that forms of deliberative exercises at the EU level are here to stay.

# Part 1. What worked? A first evaluation of the European Citizens' Panels

The ECPs are a key element of the **participatory dimension** of the Conference, alongside events organised in member states and input provided via the MDP.

The ECPs follow the footsteps of previous attempts to foster greater citizens' engagement in European political affairs and thus boost the Union's democratic legitimacy.<sup>3</sup>

But they also cement this legacy by substantially raising the scope and stakes of the conversation.

Over the course of several months, 800 randomly selected citizens from all 27 member states discussed among themselves and with political representatives a broad range of policy challenges and priorities for the EU.

Their recommendations are meant to be reflected in the final outcome of the Conference.

More specifically, the CoFoE process included the organisation of **4 ECPs on different thematic clusters**. Between September 2021 and late February 2022, each Panel met 3 times, making for a total of 12 ECP sessions. One session in each Panel was held online, and the other two took place in person at different locations across the member states (see Infobox 2).

The ECPs provide several best practices and key lessons for the future. They also help to set another stepping stone in creating a genuine culture of openness in and around EU institutions about democratic participatory processes. As such, they contribute to the Union's ongoing efforts to make European governance fit for the 21st century.

## 1.1. WHAT WORKED?

### 1.1.1. The random selection of citizens

The citizens participating in the ECPs were randomly selected by the market research company Kantar Public from across all member states to represent the

EU's sociological diversity according to five criteria: geographic origin (i.e. nationality, urban/rural), socio-economic background, level of education, gender and age. Special attention was devoted to ensuring that a third of each Panel was composed of people younger than 25, and at least one female and one male citizen per member state were represented in every ECP.

Observers have critically noted that the final sample of citizens under-represented minority groups and over-represented well-educated people. However, in the end, the selection process did make the grade when considering the substantial challenge of getting 800 citizens to commit to attending (both in-person and online) a demanding deliberative process that extended for months. It is also an achievement given the vast financial and logistical complexities of this exercise during, above all, the COVID-19 pandemic.

### 1.1.2. The logistics and organisation

Much thinking, coordination and hard work went into planning and implementing the protocol of the ECPs. For each in-person session of the different Panels, the organisers helped close to 200 citizens travel safely to various parts of Europe. They also ensured that the participants were properly hosted upon arrival, in full respect of COVID-19 restrictions: chaperons, hotels, meals, testing and on-site support made for a complex juggling act.

Organisers ensured that all the relevant actors – citizens, facilitators, experts, interpreters and observers – were informed of their specific roles at different stages of the process. Although tweaks and improvements were necessary and consciously introduced along the way (e.g. regarding the briefing of facilitators and experts), planning the roles and interaction of all players took time, careful sequencing and the constant evaluation of both plenary and subgroup work. The style and quality

### Infobox 2. What are the European Citizens' Panels?

The four ECPs are a central feature of the Conference. Involving a total of 800 citizens from all member states, these Panels allow a diverse group of randomly selected citizens to engage in a deliberative process. Over the course of three sessions, they came up with recommendations that will inform the overall Conference, its Plenaries, and a final report on the CoFoE outcome. The topic clusters discussed in the Panels mirrors the topics of the Conference (see Table 1).

Table 1. Division of the Conference topics and Panels

<b>Panel 1</b> (Strasbourg – Online – Dublin)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A stronger economy, social justice and jobs</li> <li>• Digital transformation</li> <li>• Education, culture, youth and sport</li> </ul>
<b>Panel 2</b> (Strasbourg – Online – Florence)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• European democracy</li> <li>• Values and rights, the rule of law and security</li> </ul>
<b>Panel 3</b> (Strasbourg – Online – Natolin)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Climate change and the environment</li> <li>• Health</li> </ul>
<b>Panel 4</b> (Strasbourg – Online – Maastricht)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The EU in the world</li> <li>• Migration</li> </ul>

of facilitation varied until the last Panel sessions, and the contributions of experts and fact-checkers remained marginal and, at times, insufficient throughout the process. However, the effort of getting all these moving parts to work individually and together should not be underestimated, and organisers would surely admit that the process has been a steep learning curve.

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**Simultaneous interpretation in all 24 official EU languages was provided, generally without much hassle. This was the first time that interpretation on such a large scale was made possible for so many people.**

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In addition, for the exercise to unfold efficiently, the organisers ensured that the participants from all over Europe could communicate directly with one another. Simultaneous interpretation in all 24 official EU languages was provided, generally without much hassle, especially during the in-person sessions. This was the first time that interpretation on such a large scale – both offline and online – was made possible for so many people. Without it, deliberation and exchange between so many, linguistically diverse citizens would not have been possible. The ECPs also highlighted that since the onset of COVID-19 teleworking practices, people are far more used to virtual platforms, which bodes well for future deliberative processes at the EU scale.

### 1.1.3. Participants' motivation

The ECPs worked to actively engage citizens, broaden their perspectives and leave a long-lasting impression on them. Overall, the mood remained overwhelmingly positive throughout the sessions of the four Panels. Whenever organisers asked the participants' feedback on the process – in plenary or subgroups –, they all expressed excitement, satisfaction and patience with the proceedings. While the question of what will happen with their contributions continued to weigh on the minds of many citizens, they all appreciated the opportunity to voice their opinions and ideas, as well as to hear from others. Their motivation and patience, even when faced with technical or logistical hitches or at the end of a long weekend, confirmed the important democratic function that deliberative processes can fulfil.

### 1.1.4. The results-driven process

The organisers went to great lengths to design a process for implementing the ECPs that conforms to fundamental deliberative principles<sup>4</sup> and is geared towards delivering results. The succession of plenary and subgroup discussions, expert input, professional facilitation and simultaneous interpretation were crucial in helping all Panel participants progress from broad ideas to concrete recommendations.

The first session of every Panel started with the participants' **general views** about the EU and its future before identifying **streams of key priorities** for the Union within each thematic cluster. The second sessions delved into the different streams and guided the citizens to define possible orientations – that is, approaches to the priorities under discussion. The third sessions then focused on breaking down these **orientations** into **recommendations** for EU action. Given the limited time to prepare the Panels and the restriction to three meetings (with the additional challenge of holding one meeting online), the process produced a host of interesting recommendations that now have to be translated into concrete proposals.

## 1.2. WHAT DID NOT WORK?

### 1.2.1. The many, broad themes

Despite all these efforts, the ECPs did not all go as smoothly as intended. The wide scope of the themes made it difficult for the citizens to go into any depth about the many different areas subsumed by their Panel (see Infobox 3), affecting the quality of deliberations. The participants lacked basic information about EU institutions, their functions and competences, and the decision-making process in general, let alone details about the current state of play in each of the multifaceted policy fields they were asked to scrutinise. With limited knowledge about not only their Panel's vast topic but also the individual aspects of their respective thematic cluster, the participants tended to exchange random points instead of informed and thought-through opinions.

Organisers did provide the citizens with information beforehand about the different issues and the extent to which they are and/or can be dealt with on the European level. Experts were brought into both the plenaries and subgroups during each Panel's first and second sessions. They also helped the organisers and facilitators answer the participants' questions during the third sessions, when fact-checkers were also present. In conjunction,

### Infobox 3. What topics are discussed in the Conference on the Future of Europe?

On the agenda of the Conference are nine topics, which are discussed during the participatory elements as well as the Plenary sessions.

These topics are:

- A stronger economy, social justice and jobs
- Digital transformation
- Education, culture, youth and sport
- European democracy
- Values and rights, the rule of law and security
- Climate change and the environment
- Health
- The EU in the world
- Migration

EU citizens can raise other ideas via the MDP.

participants received briefing material ahead of their Panels. However, the expertise provided was not always sufficient or objective enough and was generally limited to the plenary sessions. In the subgroups, where most of the deliberation took place, the citizens were largely on their own.

The written briefing that participants received ahead of the first ECP sessions merely summarised the ideas gathered on the MDP. Likewise, in the mere 10 minutes allocated for each presentation, some experts focused on promoting their subjective points of view rather than offering a balanced overview of their topics, occasionally using jargon that was not clear to a lay audience. In part, this was because the organisers did not properly brief the experts in advance on what was required of them. The main controversies, challenges, opportunities, ongoing initiatives or existing policies in each area received little coverage.

### 1.2.2. The lack of time

Timing issues certainly compounded the deliberation challenge. More conscientious experts struggled to present all the relevant issues in their policy fields within the short timeframe, and the citizens had little time to process and internalise the information while the process was ongoing. In response to observed shortcomings, the organisers convoked more experts, shortened plenary sessions and extended subgroup discussions. Nevertheless, without any prepping ahead of the actual ECPs, time remained insufficient. The breadth and depth of each theme were too large to be able to raise citizens' awareness about the different issues or have proper deliberations during the sessions.

For example, daily two-hour sittings of consecutive expert presentations during the second (online) sessions of the ECPs were followed by a one-hour break before citizens had to return to their subgroup discussions. With such little time to reflect on all the new and complex material received, ordinary citizens were rarely able to use this additional information to inform and develop their deliberation.

### 1.2.3. Missing links between transnational and (sub)national debates

Transnational deliberations in the ECPs were not effectively linked to the parallel debates happening in the member states. The citizens participating in the Panels were largely unaware of the national dimension of the CoFoE. In turn, the Conference process did not foresee ECPs discussing ideas or proposals emerging from the national events. The absence of a systematic relation between the different levels of deliberation is a key, structural deficit of the CoFoE. Without a common methodological framework, national debates did not have to reflect ECP discussions either. Moreover, since every country was free to conduct events if and as they wished, comparing national debates is essentially impossible. It remains to be seen whether and to what extent the contributions from national events, together with the input from the MDP, will be incorporated in the Conference Plenary sessions (see Infobox 4).

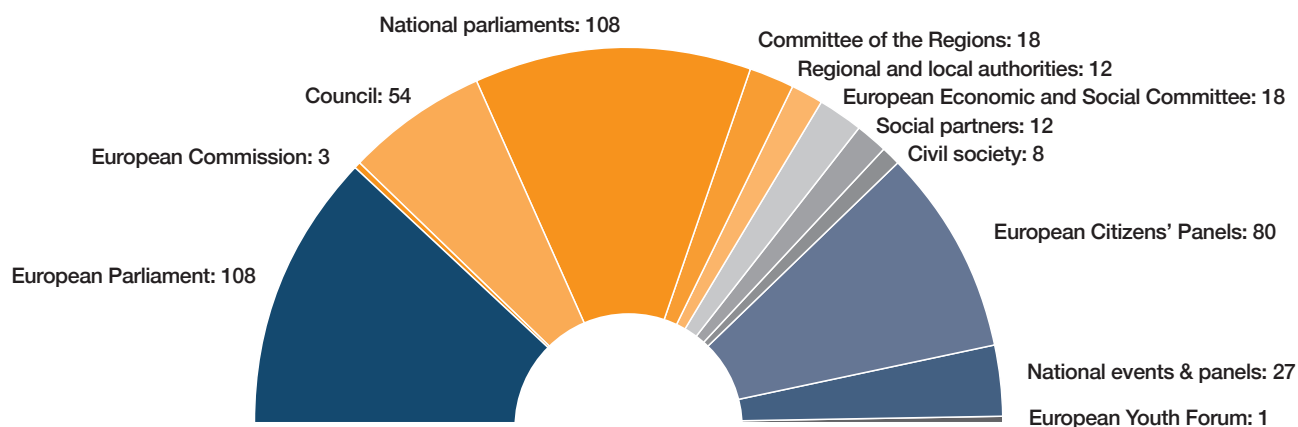
### 1.2.4. The ambiguous objective

Uncertainty about the Conference's overall objectives and the specific goal(s) of the citizens' deliberations manifested itself in three ways. First, not all facilitators properly explained the ECP process and objective of each

#### Infobox 4. What is the Conference Plenary?

The **Conference Plenary** is the main decision-making body of the Conference. The assembly of 449 members brings together representatives of European institutions, national parliaments, social partners, civil society and citizens. 80 'ambassadors' from the ECPs, 27 representatives of the national debates, and the President of the European Youth Forum represent citizens throughout the CoFoE process (see Figure 1). The Plenary discusses the input of the citizen participants and, at the end of the process, adopts conclusions that will be included in the Executive Board's final report. Working Groups on each topic of the Conference meet ahead of every Plenary meeting to prepare the sessions.

Figure 1. Composition of the Conference Plenary



subgroup discussion to the participants. As such, some could not make sense of the complex exercise they were participating in.

Second, the 20 citizens per Panel selected by ballot to represent their fellows in the Conference Plenary as ‘ambassadors’ were initially not coached to assume the role. Not knowing what to expect, what was expected of them or how they were to convey the results of their particular ECP – beyond simply their own impressions and opinions –, these ambassadors struggled at times to play their part in connecting the participatory and representative dimensions of the CoFoE.

Third, the organisers did not sufficiently manage the participants’ expectations. The extent to which the Panels would be able to influence the outcome of the Conference was partially tackled in its [Rules of Procedure](#) but not clarified to citizens. Consequently, some citizens preferred not to think about the potential impact of their work on the final result, some simply hoped that their participation would make a difference, and others doubted and continue to doubt that their input will be taken up by politicians and translated into future action.

### 1.3. WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

In terms of exercises in participatory democracy, the ECPs give a better indication of what can and cannot work at the EU level. Future initiatives seeking to build on the ECP experience should, at the very least, take the following actions:

- **Make the subject as precise as possible, avoiding broad topics.** If the aim is to collect ideas and suggestions for decision-making, a narrower topic or specific question – ideally one already on the EU agenda or in the policy process – will allow for more useful input and result in tangible proposals.
- **Allow more time for the process to unfold.** While reducing the overall number of topics into sensible discussion areas, organisers must take the time to

raise the citizen participants’ awareness about the issues discussed and ensure that they can properly deliberate with ease. This also speaks to a broader point in exercising democracy: the occasional need to ‘slow down’ the process to make it more pluralistic, produce better and more sustainable policy outcomes, and ensure that citizens support the implementation of policy decisions in practice.

- **Raise citizens’ awareness and knowledge about the topic(s) discussed before deliberations start.** If their contribution is to be meaningful, the citizen participants should have a grasp on the policy issue they are asked to debate, including the broader context, and the EU’s role and room of manoeuvre according to its legal competences. Be it via briefing materials, expert input, meetings with officials or practitioners, or visits to EU institutions, organisers should creatively inform the citizens so that deliberations can go into more depth and produce results that reflect the state of affairs of EU policymaking.
- **Enhance the links between transnational and (sub)national debates.** In order to foster wider European debate, it is necessary to intensify debates on EU-related issues in the member states, and link these discussions with debates in other EU countries and at the transnational level.
- **Clarify the objective from the outset and inform citizens about it.** The goal may be to provide policy input, consult on ideas present on the political agenda, or simply to raise awareness about ongoing processes or the functioning of the EU. Whatever it is, the overall objective of citizens’ deliberations should be spelt out as concretely as possible. All goals might be relevant, but there should be a clear distinction between them to avoid raising unrealistic expectations. This clarification is also needed to ensure the buy-in and shared commitment of EU institutions and member states, given that they should, at the end of the day, reflect the outcome of citizens’ deliberations into the implementation of policy decisions at the European and national levels.

## Part 2. What now? Five must-dos for the next stage of the Conference

Although one ECP and many national panels still remain to be completed, the Conference process has been a mixed bag so far. While the EU has successfully launched its first large-scale experiment in citizen deliberation, observers and participants point to both positive and negative aspects. Among the most worrisome items of criticism is the absence of an overall momentum and a lack of political buy-in from member states and EU institutions. The upcoming ‘hot’ phase of the Conference, when citizens’ recommendations should be turned into

concrete proposals by the Conference Plenary, must address the important concerns building up in terms of buy-in, organisation and legitimacy. The citizen and representative dimensions of the Conference must be put on an even keel in this phase of the Conference Plenary, when major decisions will have to be taken. Much will depend on how the deliberations and the recommendations from the four ECPs (as well as from the national events and the MDP) are coherently and transparently taken up at the political level and whether

they receive the promised political attention. Politicians must also engage in sincere dialogue with the citizens – meaning close and substantial interactions –, and not just acknowledge or show respect to their work.

The following 5 ‘must-dos’ for the next stage of the Conference are primarily directed at the Conference leadership and Common Secretariat, as well as the institutions, politicians and civil society organisations who are keen to make the CoFoE a success.

### MUST DO 1: RAISE THE STAKES OF THE CONFERENCE

Institutions and stakeholders should not allow the slow demise of the Conference. **Renewed political capital must be injected into the CoFoE process** by both the representatives of the EU institutions, with a particular role for the European Parliament, and the member states. But the right response to the loss of momentum is not to overcompensate by rushing the process. Due to the pandemic-related postponement of two of the four final sessions of the ECPs, and one Plenary session, the Conference leadership (see Infobox 5) must now set a realistic timeframe for completing the process, considering the lessons learned so far. This is an opportunity to allocate more time for the Conference Plenary and its Working Groups to deliberate on citizens’ recommendations and develop concrete and actionable (policy) proposals.<sup>5</sup>

Raising EU citizens’ awareness of the Conference will also require further investment in communication efforts and intensified political and public debates between EU leaders, national politicians and Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). From the beginning, it has been clear that there would only be interest in the Conference insofar as there were real choices to be made, or even ‘drama’ or controversy. Spelling out options on how to take forward the proposals discussed in the Conference, and having key constituents take positions on them, will thus be crucial in the hot phase of the CoFoE.

One way to encourage media interest would be to directly involve EU leaders and other high-profile politicians who represent different views in the upcoming meetings of the Conference Plenary, particularly by having political debates

on ‘key strategic proposals’ (see also Must-Do 5) with important actors from all sides of the political spectrum. Involving high-profile politicians in the recorded parts of Plenary debates would draw further attention to the issues that the citizen participants have signalled as important to them, and the Conference topics in general.

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The European Parliament has a particular responsibility in fostering broad and sincere engagement from its members with the process, as well as dialogue with participating citizens. This commitment should come from all political groups and highlight that the Conference is a tool of European multinational deliberation. In response to the criticism that the Conference mainly represents a pro-EU stance (which, as pointed out by critics, does not necessarily represent the views of all EU citizens), a broader range of voices, including more critical ones, should be actively encouraged to take the floor in the Conference.

At the same time, the Conference leadership should encourage greater member state engagement by stepping up Conference activities and their presence across Europe, also involving senior national politicians. More member state focus would bring higher levels of public scrutiny and, in turn, increase the pressure on the Conference to deliver, ultimately giving greater legitimacy to its outcomes.

Finally, while reflecting on the recommendations brought forward by the four ECPs, national governments should individually and collectively exhibit political leadership by discussing, expressing their political priorities and presenting concrete proposals on how these recommendations could be implemented in practice.

### Infobox 5. Who leads the Conference on the Future of Europe?

The Conference is a joint effort of all EU institutions. As such, the presidents of the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council jointly head the process. An [Executive Board](#), consisting of nine members (three from each institution) and several observers, is tasked with the day-to-day management of the process. The Board is jointly chaired by Guy Verhofstadt, MEP; Vice-President of the Commission Dubravka Šuica; and Clément Beaune, Minister of State for European Affairs (representing the current rotating Council Presidency). A **Common Secretariat** supports the Executive Board.

### MUST DO 2: ALLOW THE PANELS TO DELIBERATE AGAIN AND ENGAGE WITH THE CONFERENCE PLENARY

The lessons from the ECPs so far should be heeded. In particular, citizens from the different Panels should have the opportunity to continue to meet and exchange views following the conclusion of the Panels (i.e. during the Conference’s hot phase).

In an ideal scenario, at least **one more session should be added to each Panel**, on top of the joint feedback session



for all ECPs. At the very least, a fourth Panel session should be organised in conjunction with the Plenary’s discussion of ECP recommendations to give citizens a chance to (i) reconsider, refine and reformulate their recommendations, and (ii) respond to Plenary members’ requests for clarification of the recommendations. This would also keep the citizen ambassadors committed to the process and its conclusions. Note that this proposed additional step, which should take place in conjunction with the March and April Plenary discussions, would be different from the final event already foreseen by the Conference process – which aims to give feedback to the ECP participants about the decisions taken in the Conference Plenary (see Table 2).

The procedure for this extra session could be more straightforward and shorter than previous sessions, extending, for example, over a day maximum and taking place online. In an opening plenary, the citizens could hear from their ambassadors about the response and discussions in the Conference Plenary and/or Working Groups related to their initial list of recommendations and ask questions. Subgroups could then deliberate over the input from the Conference Plenary before a closing plenary session decides on the final point to be shared with the citizens.

### MUST DO 3: ENSURE CLARITY ON THE CONFERENCE PLENARY AND WORKING GROUP PROCESS

At the upcoming juncture of the Conference, the legitimacy of the process and output will be critical. So far, the ECPs, national events and MDP have largely functioned as ‘separate bubbles’, oblivious to the question of how their outcomes and recommendations would compare or be translated into concrete proposals. In the Conference’s [Rules of Procedure](#), there is no clear indication of the specific procedure that will structure the Conference Plenary meetings and the nine Working Groups, or the role of each of the different Plenary members. **A clear deliberation methodology should therefore be introduced, along with a delineation of tasks and goals for each Plenary, Working Group and sub-group meeting.**

In practice, the [Working Groups](#) will play a crucial role in both translating input from the ECPs, national events and MDP into Plenary positions, and bridging the gap between the participatory and representative dimensions

**Table 2. Timeline of the Conference on the Future of Europe**

Date	Event
9 May 2021	Launch of the Conference on the Future of Europe
17 June 2021	First Citizens’ Event in Portugal
18-19 June 2021	Inaugural Conference Plenary
17-19 September 2021	European Citizens’ Panel 1, first session
24-26 September 2021	European Citizens’ Panel 2, first session
1-3 October 2021	European Citizens’ Panel 3, first session
8-9 October 2021	European Youth Event
15-17 October 2021	European Citizens’ Panel 4, first session
22-23 October 2021	Conference Plenary
5-7 November 2021	European Citizens’ Panel 1, second session
12-14 November 2021	European Citizens’ Panel 2, second session
19-21 November 2021	European Citizens’ Panel 3, second session
26-27 November 2021	European Citizens’ Panel 4, second session
10-12 December 2021	European Citizens’ Panel 2, third session
17 December 2021	Working groups
7-9 January 2022	European Citizens’ Panel 3, third session
21-22 January 2022	Conference Plenary
11-13 February 2022	European Citizens’ Panel 4, third session
25-27 February 2022	European Citizens’ Panel 1, third session
11-12 March 2022	Conference Plenary
25-26 March 2022	Conference Plenary
8-9 April 2022	Conference Plenary
9 May 2022	Political event
TBC	Feedback event with ECP participants

of the Conference (see Infobox 6). This requires the Working Groups to have clear, publicly available agendas. The Working Group Chairs will play an important role in ensuring a fair, inclusive and result-driven process. The meetings should be structured around themes and foresee introductory presentations by experts to ensure that deliberations will be fact-based, focused and output-oriented.

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**The Working Groups will play a crucial role in both translating input from the ECPs, national events and MDP into Plenary positions, and bridging the gap between the participatory and representative dimensions of the Conference.**

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In particular, the role citizen ambassadors play in the Conference Plenary and the Working Groups should be further clarified and developed. Ambassadors must be able to ensure that the Panel recommendations are correctly interpreted and reflected within the Conference Plenary and its Working Groups. Mechanisms must be in place to guarantee that they have a real voice in the proceedings through, *inter alia*, expert support, the right to react to proposals and extra speaking time.

#### **MUST DO 4: TRANSLATE CITIZENS' RECOMMENDATIONS INTO ACTIONABLE PROPOSALS**

The next step of the Conference will be to deal with a massive influx of citizens' input. Judging from the outputs of the Panels which have already finished their

#### **Infobox 6. What are the Working Groups?**

The purpose of the [Working Groups](#) is to discuss the input of the citizens (i.e. recommendations from the ECPs and national citizens panels, input from the MDP) and feed this deliberation back to the Conference Plenary. In practice, they will play an important role in narrowing down the high number of recommendations into Conference proposals to be debated in the 25-26 March and 8-9 April meetings of the Conference Plenary.

There are nine different Working Groups – one per Conference topic. The Groups consist of Conference Plenary members, between 46 and 53 members. The ECP ambassadors are spread across the Groups (i.e. between 6 and 10 citizens per Group).

The Groups meet in parallel to the Plenary sessions, both in-person and online. Each Group's Co-Chair structures the work of their respective Group, which will give result in 'summary reports'.

deliberations, the four ECPs will produce a total of around 160 to 180 recommendations.<sup>6</sup> In addition, ideas from the national events and the MDP will also need to be collected, discussed and reflected in the proceedings.

As an initial step, a process to assign proposals from the four ECPs to the nine Working Groups should be foreseen. A further 'filtering' of input will also be needed to allow the Working Group deliberations to function effectively. We suggest **categorising the recommendations** into four groups:

1. **proposals that relate to existing policies or ongoing institutional or policy discussions**, and as such are well-prepared and can be discussed directly;
2. **proposals that are new** and can be discussed as such but might require further detailing and/or operationalisation;
3. **proposals that require further discussion or development** because *prima facie*, in their current state, they seem unfeasible or are the result of insufficient time to finalise deliberations; and
4. **proposals that express values or principles** and require a standpoint to be taken in the framework of the Conference, or should be further translated into detailed policy proposals or across a number of recommendations.

The Working Group stage will clearly lead to further discussions and choices to be made regarding the final list of proposals. The very value of this stage lies in straightforward and frank debates between all the Plenary constituents: citizens, representatives of EU institutions and member states, and civil society. Still, particular care must be taken to ensure the continued involvement and ownership of citizens. Throughout the reordering and filtering of the input, a record of the process must be kept to ensure transparency. This is necessary to make sure that the input has not been reframed to suit the purpose of other actors involved in the Conference Plenary while ignoring the original recommendations brought forward by citizens in the framework of the four ECPs.

#### **MUST DO 5: SPECIFY THE FINAL PATH TO AND FORM OF THE CONFERENCE'S OUTCOME**

After the Plenary has translated the input from each of the Conference's constituent parts into actionable proposals, these will be presented to the Executive Board. How these proposals will be reached and the format they will take is yet unclear. The legitimacy of the Conference could be called into question, either by participants themselves or by observers, if this phase of the Conference is too much of a 'black box'.

As stated in the Conference's [Rules of Procedure](#), there must be consensus on the proposals included in the final list to be presented to the Executive Board. **Consensus could be measured in the following ways:**

- The proposal has a **high level of support from the Plenary members**. There is either no additional deliberation (and can be immediately added to the list of final proposals) or little deliberation in the Plenary.
- There is support for the proposal, but there are **points of criticism that must be addressed**. The Plenary returns the proposal with comments back to the Working Group for further discussion before the Plenary can re-examine it.
- There is **little to no support** for the proposal. The Plenary must provide an explanation as to why it will not include this proposal in the final list, including why reworking the proposal satisfactorily is not possible. This should be an option of last resort.

The final list should be comprised of a limited number of proposals that the Plenary identifies as particularly important for the future of Europe. In the spirit of keeping citizens informed about what happens to their recommendations, this list should be fed back into the ECPs. While conducting an approval exercise for each proposal would be too time-consuming and resource-intensive, the citizens must be able to provide final feedback. Citizens must be given the opportunity to examine the need and rationale for the 'strategic proposals' identified in the Plenary. This will help manage the citizens' expectations – currently a concern in the process – and ensure that the Plenary and Working Group stage is not criticised for 'cherry-picking' proposals.

At this point, transparency is crucial to retain the buy-in from the citizens. The ultimate outcome must reflect a convergence of positions between the participatory and representative dimensions of the Conference.

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**The ultimate outcome must reflect a convergence of positions between the participatory and representative dimensions of the Conference.**

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The overall list of proposals should then be passed to the Executive Board to be written up into a final report with the help of the Common Secretariat, including the rationale behind any discarded input and proposals. This report must reflect the outcome of the Conference Plenary; any divergence from the deliberations must have a clear and valid explanation. This report must include a record of all the recommendations from the citizens to ensure that they do not feel like parts of their work was side-lined, and to make clear that other recommendations have not been rejected and can be referred back to.

Crucially, the final report must also provide an answer to the expectations that the Conference process has created: What can people expect now? Where will recommendations go? When will proposals see the light of the day? In this regard, the **final report should allocate proposals to specific actors** (across EU institutions and national and regional governmental agencies) and **affix an indicative timeframe** (i.e. short-, medium- and long-term) to the implementation of each proposal.

## Part 3. What next? The EU's future participation toolbox

The experience of the CoFoE so far does not call for a 'CoFoE 2.0' further down the line. However, it does contribute a great deal of knowledge about the dos and don'ts of participatory processes, as well as lessons about the resistance points and bottlenecks in the current system. All of this should guide future efforts to establish better initiatives and more modern democratic decision-making structures.

Participatory democracy is here to stay. EU institutions and national governments can ill-afford to only pay lip service about openness and democratic participatory processes. They must offer it concretely in the day-to-day policymaking of the EU while ensuring that the outcomes of citizens' deliberations find their way into actual policy practice. New spaces should be created where citizens

can inject opinions, ideas and recommendations directly into EU decision-making; spaces that go beyond today's consultation mechanisms. The experience of the Panels has shown that citizens' input is ready to exceed the established silos of policymaking. Citizens are willing to go further than governments, which often hesitate to introduce ambitious policy ambitions.

The Conference should not be a one-off experiment. Ultimately, the process of enhancing the participation of citizens in EU policymaking should be about changing democratic culture: an adapted mindset is required not only in EU institutions but at all levels of governance and among citizens. Europeans should meet their representatives halfway if real change is to occur. Citizens should expect and demand that participation

in deliberative processes, which shape common policies, eventually becoming an EU citizenship *right*, which future generations can exert at some point in their lives.

### 3.1. FOUR PROPOSALS FOR THE EU'S FUTURE PARTICIPATION TOOLBOX

[ECP 2](#) (see Infobox 2, page 4) has called for a higher level of citizens' participation in EU policymaking and that the European Union holds Citizen's Assemblies (see Infobox 7).

In the upcoming phase, the Conference Plenary – which includes both citizens and representatives of EU institutions, national parliaments, governments, and the civic sector – should translate this citizens' recommendation into actionable proposals that eventually find their way into the final report. These proposals should reflect the experience and lessons learned from the current Conference. The analysis of the CoFoE thus far (see Part 1) shows that additions to the EU's future participation toolbox should (i) **make the subject(s) as precise as possible**, avoiding broad topics without micromanaging the process; (ii) **allow for more time** to unfold the deliberative process and **provide sufficient independent expert support**; (iii) **specify the concrete objective(s)** from the outset without pre-programming the outcome; (iv) **enhance the connections between transnational and (sub) national debates**; and (v) **improve the links between the citizens and representative dimensions**.

#### Infobox 7. Recommendation number 39 of ECP 2 on European democracy, values and rights, the rule of law and security<sup>7</sup>

"We recommend that the European Union holds Citizen's Assemblies. We strongly recommend that they are developed through a legally binding and compulsory law or regulation. The citizens' assemblies should be held every 12-18 months. Participation of the citizens should not be mandatory but incentivised, while organised on the basis of limited mandates. Participants must be selected randomly, with representativity criteria, also not representing any organisation of any kind, nor being called to participate because of their professional role when being assembly members. If needed, there will be support of experts so that assembly members have enough information for deliberation. Decision-making will be in the hands of citizens. The EU must ensure the commitment of politicians to citizens' decisions taken in Citizens' Assemblies. In case citizens' proposals are ignored or explicitly rejected, EU institutions must be accountable for it, justifying the reasons why this decision was made."

Taking up Recommendation 39 of ECP 2, and reflecting the analysis of the Conference proceedings thus far, this report suggests the following **four potential options** (see Annex 1) to translate the call for more citizens participation into actionable proposals that can be implemented in practice:

1. **European citizens' deliberations on key legislative proposals;**
2. **multilevel European citizens' deliberations on major transformative topics;**
3. **'big tent' fora on the EU's strategic priorities; and**
4. **European citizens' deliberations ahead of European Conventions.**

**These four options are neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive and aim to provide 'food for thought'** to the Working Groups and Conference Plenary. Not every option presented in this report necessarily need to be implemented. They could also coexist, as they focus on bringing participatory democracy into different stages and levels in critical moments of the EU's policymaking cycle. Overall, the objective is to achieve a gradual cultural change in EU democracy that EU institutions and member states support. Governments should thus endorse and actively promote the process of moving democracy to another level by adding new elements to the Union's citizen participation toolbox as complementary add-ons to the representative dimension of EU democracy.

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The objective is to achieve a gradual cultural change in EU democracy that EU institutions and member states support.

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## PROPOSAL 1: EUROPEAN CITIZENS' DELIBERATIONS ON KEY LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS



Citizens can express their views on the priorities and added value of EU action for new initiatives, or evaluations of existing policies and laws, through the open public consultations that the European Commission organises. Public consultations have been improved in recent years through the “[Have your say](#)” portal and “[Calls for evidence](#)” process. Although in terms of absolute numbers, citizens might be the biggest group of respondents, the detailed input to these consultative processes is dominated by business representatives and other stakeholders that have the capacity to invest in the often complex subject matters and processes under discussion.<sup>8</sup>

**A new instrument of participation is therefore needed to offer citizens the opportunity to provide input on key legislative proposals early on in the process and in a different manner.**<sup>9</sup> What is needed is a deliberative process where a group of randomly selected citizens from all over Europe are given the time and resources to contribute more meaningfully to the main orientations and concrete formulation of key legislative proposals brought forward by the Commission.

Given its exclusive right of initiative, it should be the Commission that determines whether a consultative deliberation should take place, depending *inter alia* on the potential public interest in the subject at hand and key policy issues identified in the EU's strategies priorities (see also Proposal 3).

**In order to make it possible for such consultative deliberations to also be triggered ‘bottom up’, an additional possibility could be to introduce them in the context of the European Citizens’ Initiative.**

Once an initiative reaches a million signatures, the Commission decides what action to take (or not). In the future, the required number of signatures could trigger a consultative citizens’ deliberation to map out the proposed action further.

The Commission should also be responsible for overseeing and organising the process of citizens’ deliberations on key legislative proposals. In principle, such deliberations should be conducted at the outset of major legislative proposals dealing with at least one proposal in each area covered by the Joint Declaration of the Commission, Council and European Parliament on the EU's legislative priorities for a given year. In the ensuing interinstitutional legislative process, the Parliament and the Council should also have the right to jointly request the Commission to consult citizens on specific issues.

The main findings and recommendations from these citizens’ deliberations on key legislative proposals would be summarised by the organisers in a final report for the European Commission. The Commission’s legislative proposal should reflect this report, including adding it in full as an annex.

No formal legal and/or legislative changes are necessary to implement this proposal, although laying it down in a legal instrument would be beneficial. As a minimum, the Commission should adapt its Better Regulation Guidelines to give a formal role to these deliberations. The Commission College’s working methods should also acknowledge the role of consultative deliberations. The Parliament and Council could adapt their rules of procedures to allow for respective panels to be requested in the context of the institutional negotiations during the ordinary legislative procedure. This provision should also be included in the interinstitutional agreement on better law-making.

## PROPOSAL 2: MULTILEVEL CITIZENS' DELIBERATIONS ON MAJOR TRANSFORMATIVE TOPICS



Given the political challenges related to the implementation of major transformative projects, **there is a need to raise awareness about the potential benefits and costs of certain policy decisions.** In addition, there is also a need to increase people's buy-in while simultaneously upholding pressure when it comes to implementing policy decisions into concrete action at the European and (sub)national levels.

Citizens' deliberations on major transformative topics can help increase awareness and generate EU-wide public pressure to develop concrete policy proposals. Citizens should be able to suggest subthemes, topics and specific questions to concentrate on, although these should be within the areas of EU competence. These citizens' deliberations would take the public's pulse on difficult policy choices and help Europeans understand and exchange positions and arguments with citizens from other EU countries.

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**Citizens' deliberations on major transformative topics can help increase awareness and generate EU-wide public pressure to develop concrete policy proposals.**

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This instrument should involve EU-wide, multilevel citizens' deliberations that concentrate on major transformative topics, including those identified as the Union's strategic priorities for the upcoming politico-institutional cycle (see Proposal 3). It would

aim to foster a structured debate at different levels of policymaking – local, regional, national, European – on the strategic challenges for Europe's future. The 'green transition' and the 'digital transition' are examples of major transformations that deserve and would benefit from such EU-wide deliberations.

The multilevel process would foresee local, regional, national and European citizens' panels involving different sets of randomly selected citizens. Some of the participants in the transnational ECP should be recruited from the pool who joined (sub)national deliberations, to create more direct links between the different levels of debate.

Citizens' deliberations organised at the (sub)national level should adhere to a common methodological framework that establishes a set of basic principles and rules agreed upon by all EU member states while leaving ample room for the diversity of practices. This mutually agreed framework would help streamline deliberative processes at the (sub)national level, culminating in discussions taking place in the ECP. The Panel would profit from input provided via reports that summarise the outcomes of deliberations in the individual member states (i.e. national reports). While allowing member states the flexibility to implement deliberations according to national traditions and specificities, creating a common methodological approach would also help better link (sub)national and transnational debates.

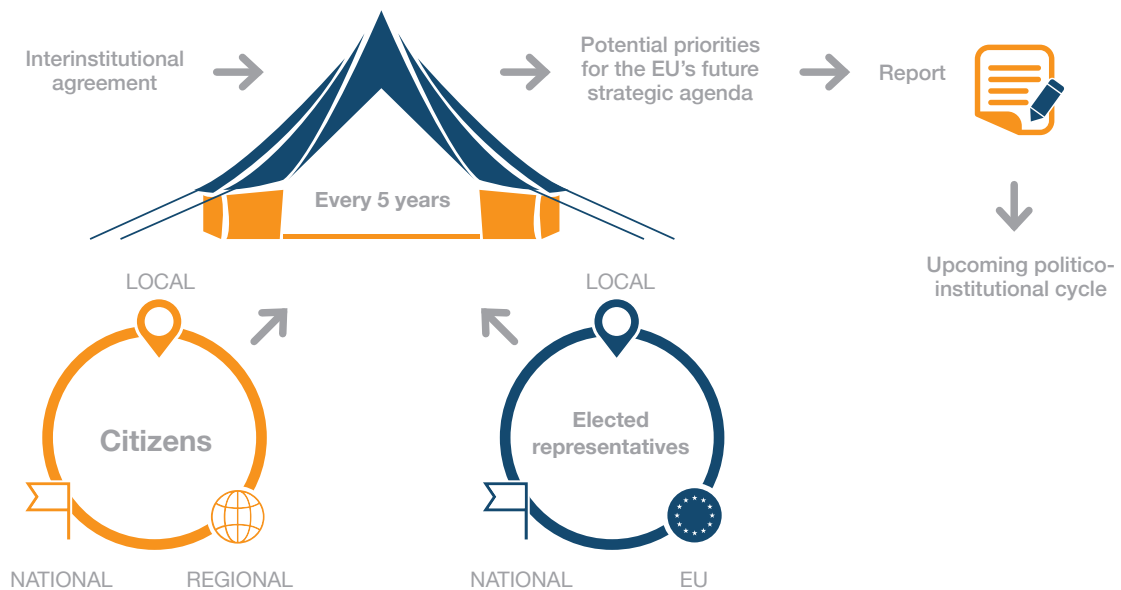
The **key findings and recommendations** of the ECP on major transformative topics should be **discussed with representatives** of EU institutions, national parliaments, other EU bodies and civil society organisations in the context of a Plenary bringing together the citizens' and representative dimensions, including elected representatives from the regional and local level. The outcome of these multilevel

deliberations (subnational, national, transnational) should be summarised in a **final report**, to which the EU institutions are obliged to respond.

No formal legal and/or legislative changes are necessary to implement this proposal, although laying it down in a legal instrument would be beneficial. As a minimum, the Commission should adapt its Better Regulation Guidelines to give a formal role to these deliberations. The instrument could also be added to the interinstitutional agreement on law-making.

The EU's answer to democratic challenges cannot only come in the form of new participatory instruments that are limited to citizens. Part of the answer must also emerge from **improvements of the EU's existing multilevel governance structures and stronger interaction between citizens and different levels of elected representatives**. This need is all the more palpable in the setting of the EU's strategic priorities, to which citizens and elected representatives should feel they can easily relate.

**PROPOSAL 3: BIG TENT FORA ON THE EU'S STRATEGIC PRIORITIES**



In this regard, the EU should examine the possibility of creating **'big tent' fora**, where randomly selected citizens and elected representatives from different policy levels (i.e. EU to local) gather every five years to discuss the Union's strategic agenda. Such fora could involve 500 to 600 members made up of citizens and a cross-section of elected representatives at all levels across Europe. As has been highlighted by the current CoFoE process, bringing citizens and politicians together is difficult yet necessary. The big tent fora would convene them to identify the EU's potential strategic priorities for the upcoming politico-institutional cycle.

**Bringing citizens and politicians together is difficult yet necessary. The big tent fora would convene them to identify the EU's potential strategic priorities for the upcoming politico-institutional cycle.**

Aiming to inspire the debates about the Union's next strategic agenda in the electoral campaign before the 2024 European Parliament election, participating members would brainstorm on the key challenges that could impact the EU over the next decade and be asked about the priorities the Union should focus on in the upcoming cycle. The objective would not be to go into detail about how these priorities should be translated into concrete policy objectives or legislative proposals at the EU level. Participants should rather present an overview of what they believe the EU and its members should concentrate on in the years to come.

The process should be under the purview of the European Council and the European Commission, given that the former is responsible for the elaboration of the Union's "general political directions and priorities" (Article 15(1) TEU), and the latter initiates the EU's "annual and multi-annual programming" (Article 17(1)) by setting its strategic priorities at the beginning of the Commission's mandate. This deliberation process should be led by an independent 'chair' co-designated by the European Council and the European Commission and take place every five years, specifically in the first half of the year

before the European Parliament election. The first opportunity to hold citizens’ deliberations on the EU’s strategic priorities would thus be in the first half of 2023.

The potential strategic priorities and the motivations behind them should be summarised in a final report prepared under the auspices of the ‘chair’ and submitted in the first semester of the year before the European Parliament election. The final report should inspire campaign debates and function as an input document for the debate on the European Council’s strategic priorities and the Commission’s priorities

for the upcoming cycle. At the end of the process, the content of the final report should be reflected in the priorities of both the European Council and the European Commission. In case the European Council and/or the European Commission decide(s) not to reflect the strategic priorities identified in the citizens’ deliberation, they should justify their reasoning. This instrument would not require changing the EU Treaties. Nevertheless, it should be developed by interinstitutional agreement. The Commission and the Council may decide to include provisions in their respective rules of procedure.

**PROPOSAL 4: EUROPEAN CITIZENS’ DELIBERATIONS IN CONJUNCTION WITH EUROPEAN CONVENTIONS**



This final option would **allow citizens to provide input to any future European Convention** in the context of the EU’s “ordinary revision procedure” (Article 48 TEU). A Convention should examine the proposals for amendments to the EU Treaties to be adopted by consensus in the context of a subsequent intergovernmental conference. The establishment of a ECP ahead of a European Convention would embed citizens’ participation from the start of the EU’s treaty revision procedure.<sup>10</sup>

In terms of content, the list of topics deliberated would reflect the proposals brought forward by member states, the European Parliament or the Commission. This would either increase or reduce the competences conferred on the Union in the Treaties (Article 48(2)). This process would allow citizens to focus on a specific set of questions and/or issues without predetermining the outcome of their deliberations while also allowing them to insert their own topics into their deliberations and final recommendations. In other words, **citizens could contribute to the Convention agenda** brought forward by the EU institutions and member states.

In the spirit of the EU Treaties, this process, involving randomly selected citizens from all over Europe (including potential future EU countries), should be initiated by the European Council after consulting the European Parliament and the Commission and in conjunction with the Convention process.

The outcome of deliberations should be summarised in a final report for the European Convention to enrich and inspire the discussions among Convention members, including representatives of national parliaments, EU governments, the Parliament and the Commission. ‘Ambassadors’ from the European citizens’ deliberations should participate in the proceedings of the European Convention as observers.

**The proposal would not necessarily require changing the EU Treaties.** The European Parliament, Council and Commission could jointly support the idea to allow citizens to provide input to a future European Convention by committing to this either in a political declaration or an interinstitutional agreement. However, in the case of a treaty change, Article 48 TEU should be amended to also reflect and codify the introduction of this new instrument of citizen participation in the Union’s primary law.



### 3.2. CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AS THE NEW NORMAL

Citizen participation initiatives will not successfully complement representative democracy in the EU overnight or on the basis of a single proposal. The proposals outlined in this report focus on critical moments of decision-making and make a case for how they could be made more inclusive. The proposals are not, however, a simple matter of ‘take it or leave it’.

An inclusive, participatory European Union will require continued reflection on how institutions can support bottom-up efforts with the appropriate tools, funding and constructive engagement. In this context, the MDP is an innovation from the CoFoE process that could be further developed to become a permanent feature of citizen participation in EU politics. In future, the Platform should not only be a place for citizens to share ideas on ongoing deliberations. It could also be used to gather proposals that could inspire the initiation of citizen participation processes at the European level.

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**EU governance reform will require a gradual change of democratic culture and wide recognition that citizens’ participation can add value to decision-making processes at all levels of policymaking.**

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Finally, EU governance reform will require a gradual change of democratic culture and wide recognition that citizens’ participation can add value to decision-making processes at all levels of policymaking, from the local and regional to the national and European. Ultimately, this cultural change will also enhance the sense among EU citizens that they have not only national citizenship but also wider European citizenship that makes a meaningful difference in their lives.

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<sup>1</sup> von der Leyen, Ursula, “[Speech by President von der Leyen at the inaugural event of the Conference on the Future of Europe](#)”, Strasbourg, 09 May 2021.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> For example, 200 randomly selected citizens were brought to Brussels in 2006 under the framework of the European Commission’s Plan D initiative to discuss in their own language what they identify as priorities for Europe’s future. In 2009, an EU-wide online consultation was held as part of the Commission’s Debate Europe programme. In 2018, a Citizens’ Panel in Brussels saw 96 Europeans select their 12 most important issues for the EU’s future. See Stratulat, Corina and Johannes Greubel (2019), “[Preparing for the Conference on the Future of Europe: the ‘known knowns’ of citizens’ participation](#)”, Brussels: European Policy Centre.

<sup>4</sup> See e.g. Chwalisz, Claudia (2020), “[Good practice principles for deliberative processes for public decision making](#)” in *Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave*, Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

<sup>5</sup> Greubel, Johannes, “[High Noon for the Conference on the Future of Europe](#)”, *Euractiv*, 26 January 2022.

<sup>6</sup> So far, Panels 2 (39 recommendations), 3 (51) and 4 (40) have resulted in 130 proposals. At the time of publication, the third and final session of Panel 1 has not yet taken place, so it is still unclear how many recommendations will come out of this Panel.

<sup>7</sup> Conference on the Future of Europe (2021), [European Citizens’ Panel 2: “European democracy / Values and rights, rule of law, security”](#), European Union, pp.16-17.

<sup>8</sup> See e.g. European Commission (2020), [Summary Report on the open public consultation on the Digital Services Act Package](#).

<sup>9</sup> See Recommendation 29 of the European Citizens’ Panel 2: “increase the frequency of online and offline interactions between the EU and its citizens”. Conference on the Future of Europe (2021), *op.cit.*, p.12.

<sup>10</sup> See Recommendation 35 of the European Citizens’ Panel 2: “the EU [should reopen] the discussion about the constitution of Europe with a view to creating a constitution informed by the citizens of the EU.” Conference on the Future of Europe (2021), *op.cit.*, p.15.

# Annex 1. Overview of the four proposals for the EU's future participation toolbox

	European citizens' deliberations on key legislative proposals	Multilevel citizens' deliberations on major transformative topics	Big tent fora on the EU's strategic priorities	European citizens' deliberations ahead of European Conventions
<b>FOCUS &amp; OBJECTIVE</b>	Input to key legislative proposals	Deliberate major transformative topics	Enhance multilevel governance and ownership of strategic priorities	Input to upcoming European Convention
<b>INITIATOR</b>	COM, though also upon request of EP or EUCO  Automatically triggered in the case of a successful European Citizens' Initiative	COM, EUCO or EP	COM or EUCO	EUCO, after consulting COM and EP
<b>TIMING</b>	Before presentation of draft proposal	TBD according to policy needs/planning	First semester in year before EP elections (every 5 years)	In conjunction with European Convention
<b>NATURE &amp; NUMBER OF CITIZENS' PANELS</b>	1 transnational ECP	(Sub)national citizens' panels & 1 transnational ECP	1 transnational ECP	Multiple ECPs reflecting core thematic areas
<b>PARTICIPANTS</b>	200 randomly selected citizens from EU27	Randomly selected citizens at all (sub) national panels  ECP participants recruited from (sub) national panels	500-600 randomly selected citizens and elected representatives from different levels of decision-making across EU27	Randomly selected citizens from EU27 and accession states  ECP ambassadors participate in Convention
<b>OUTPUT/ADDRESSEE</b>	Final report submitted to COM  Legislative proposal should reflect said report	Final report submitted to COM, EUCO and EP Institutions adopt positions detailing how to follow up outcome	Final report submitted to COM and EUCO  Outcome to be reflected in strategic agenda and priorities	Final report prepared for Convention
<b>NECESSARY LEGAL/ LEGISLATIVE CHANGES</b>	Adaptation of COM Better Regulation Guidelines and working methods, EP and Council rules of procedure	Adaptation of COM Better Regulation Guidelines and interinstitutional agreement on law-making	Interinstitutional agreement, and adaptation of COM working methods and EUCO rules of procedure	Political declaration or interinstitutional agreement of COM, EP and EUCO  Possibility to amend Art.48 TEU

# Annex 2. Composition of the Conference Observatory High-Level Advisory Group

## CO-CHAIRS:

**Herman VAN ROMPUY**, President Emeritus,  
European Council; President, European Policy Centre

**Brigid LAFFAN**, Emeritus Professor, Robert Schuman  
Centre, European University Institute

## PARTICIPANTS:

**Rosa BALFOUR**, Director, Carnegie Europe

**Cathryn CLÜVER ASHBROOK**, Director and CEO,  
German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP)

**Marian CRAMERS**, Director of Development and  
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**Catherine DAY**, Chair, Irish Citizens' Assembly;  
former Secretary-General, European Commission

**Bastian DE MONTE**, District Council, NEOS;  
Vice President, JUNOS

**Janis A. EMMANOULIDIS**, Director of Studies and  
Deputy Chief Executive, European Policy Centre

**Julia FERNÁNDEZ ARRIBAS**, President, Equipo Europa

**Lykke FRIIS**, Director, Think Tank Europa; former  
Danish Minister of Climate and Energy and Minister  
for Gender Equality

**Dominik HIERLEMANN**, Senior Expert,  
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**Christophe HILLION**, Professor of European law,  
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**Rem KORTEWEG**, Senior Researcher,  
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**Ivan KRASSTEV**, Chairman, Centre for Liberal Strategies

**Péter KRÉKO**, Director, Political Capital

**Milena LAZAREVIC**, Programme Director, CEP

**Viktória LILLA PATÓ**, Junior Researcher,  
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**George PAGOULATOS**, Director General, Hellenic  
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**Wojciech PRZYBYLSKI**, Editor-in-Chief,  
*Visegrad Insight*

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**Georg E. RIEKELES**, Associate Director and Head  
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**Marietje SCHAAKE**, International Policy Director,  
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Artificial Intelligence; former MEP

**Daniela SCHWARZER**, Executive Director for Europe  
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**Corina STRATULAT**, Head of the European Politics and  
Institutions programme and Senior Policy Analyst,  
European Policy Centre

**Monika SUS**, Senior Fellow, Hertie School; Associate  
Professor of Political Science, Polish Academy of Sciences

**Paweł ŚWIEBODA**, Director General, Human Brain  
Project; CEO, EBRAINS AISBL; former EU Advisor to the  
President of Poland

**Nathalie TOCCI**, Director, Istituto Affari Internazionali  
(IAI)

**Georgina WRIGHT**, Senior Fellow and Director of the  
Europe Programme, Institut Montaigne



**The Conference Observatory, a joint initiative of Bertelsmann Stiftung, the European Policy Centre, King Baudouin Foundation and Stiftung Mercator, will closely monitor the Conference on the Future of Europe, assess its impact and present ideas on how to improve it.**

The Observatory aims to make the Conference a meaningful and successful endeavour by monitoring its proceedings, providing policy input and recommendations on the strategic priorities that citizens will discuss, and assessing the potential institutional and legal consequences of debates conducted during the Conference. Through the Observatory, the consortium will also advise the Conference leadership and develop proposals for the future participatory and democratic make-up of the EU.

The European Union faces major transformational challenges such as climate change, digitalisation, a fragile global order and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. In an environment of continuing uncertainty and crisis, the EU must demonstrate it is capable of critical self-reflection and renewal. The Conference on the Future of Europe could and should be used to this end.

The Conference is also a test case for the EU's ability to include its citizens in the conversation, have an EU-wide debate about necessary reforms, and think about the right institutional structure for the decades ahead. The involvement of people from all member states, from all walks of life, will be new and, in many ways, unprecedented.