

# Aiming for a reform-oriented Dialogue on the Future of Europe

## Four demands from EM Germany for the launch of the Conference on the Future of Europe

Position paper of the responsible experts from EM Germany's board on the basis of the network's political demands  
(translation of the original German version)

**As with previous crises, the Covid-19 pandemic has revealed that European cooperation is more important than ever, but that the EU has limited capacities to respond quickly and adequately to common challenges. We therefore call on the EU and its member states to use the opportunity of the Conference on the Future of Europe to make the EU fit for the future in a broad and result-oriented dialogue.**

In 2019, Ursula von der Leyen pledged a major debate on the EU's future, promising *"a new push for European democracy"*, and showed herself open to fundamental reforms, including treaty changes. After laborious negotiations regarding the mandate, the Conference on the Future of Europe is now taking shape. EM Germany has followed the process from the beginning and warmly welcomed the agreement found on a Joint Declaration.

However, as the largest network for European policy in Germany, we are advocating for this debate to not simply remain an inconsequential citizens' dialogue. The Conference must initiate necessary reforms, create a common understanding about the future of Europe and resolve negotiation gridlocks on core issues of European integration.

### **Our demands:**

- **Creating a European public space and ensuring transparency:** The Conference is based on inclusiveness, openness and transparency. In order to live up to these principles of the Joint Declaration, not only the European citizens' panels but also other activities, such as those of the Plenary, should be web-streamed in all EU official languages, and all contributions and documents should be available online. For all participants and outsiders, it must be possible at every step of the process to understand why and according to which criteria proposals from the panels and events are rejected or accepted in the Plenary. The Executive Board in particular has a duty in this regard. We also call on the media to actively cover the dialogue and to report on its activities in the EU's official languages.

- **Triggering reforms and enabling treaty changes:** All Conference parties should endorse the European Parliament's proposal and commit themselves to translating the Conference outcomes into tangible reforms. A mere listening exercise as well as the current commitment to follow up on the outcome only in full respect to the competences of the EU institutions is not enough. We therefore call on the Conference parties to approach the dialogue with an open mind and no taboos; otherwise, the dialogue runs the risk of becoming a citizens' dialogue with no results which would lead to strong disappointment. The possibilities for initiating treaty changes based on Art. 48 TEU should not be excluded from the outset. The role of the plenary, in which all institutions responsible for treaty changes according to Art. 48 TEU are represented, is essential. The representative Plenary members are obliged to discuss, examine and elaborate the input from the panels and the online platform.
- **Making the Conference on the Future a discussion amplifier for the 2024 European elections:** A Conference on the Future of Europe that is to be concluded as early as spring 2022 for no objective reason contradicts the announcements of a two-year dialogue. Due to the current pandemic, it runs the risk of becoming a digital debate that takes place outside public awareness. Yet, cross-border physical dialogues must be a core part of the exchange. We therefore call on the Executive Board to use their discretionary powers from the Joint Declaration and to extend the dialogue at least up to and including 2023. Only then, can the Conference provide *"a new push for European democracy"* and become the thematic basis for the 2024 European elections, in which the fundamental decision on the future of Europe will be put to the vote as part of the democratic process.
- **Ensuring a representative participation:** This can be achieved in particular through the structural inclusion of democratically constituted organisations. We gladly welcome that social forces can contribute to the dialogue through their own events and are also involved in the Conference process through institutions such as the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). Young people's concerns must also become an integral part of the debate on the future of Europe. We therefore call for a strong involvement of the institutionalised youth interest groups. Citizens' panels can further strengthen participation as a complementary element if they operate according to clear criteria, including the principle of representativeness. In this context, it is crucial that not only the European citizens' panels are representatively selected, but also the national citizens' panels, so that all groups, minorities and critical voices are heard. In order to raise public awareness about the dialogue, we call for the active involvement of regional and local actors and close cooperation with the European Committee of the Regions and the EESC.

The deep divisions on core issues, including on rule of law, migration policy, and a (gender-)just society as well as the necessity of the EU's further democratic and structural development require an open, broad and, above all, result-oriented debate on the future of Europe.

Thus, EM Germany will critically follow the Conference on the Future of Europe in Germany at a national as well as at a regional level together with its regional committees and member organisations.

In the 2021 German parliamentary election year, we thereby aim to launch a public debate on Germany's future with the EU and make the Conference a legitimising force, at the end of which there will not only be statements but tangible reforms for a democratic and future-proof EU.

**Annex: EM Germany's infographic on the Joint Declaration of the Conference on the Future of Europe**

# Conference on the Future of Europe

Joint declaration

#EBDGratik

