



## **S&D Strategy on the Conference on the Future of Europe**

### **General vision and challenges**

Our political family has the most far-reaching vision on the future of Europe, by combining suggestions for improving the functioning of the European institutions with a strong focus on the needed social and economic answers for the recovery.

A progressive Europe can only be achieved if it becomes a "movement of citizens" too. In order to achieve this goal we need participation and enthusiasm, and this is what a progressive vision on the Conference process should aim at.

The Covid-19 pandemic has helped raise awareness about the added value and confirmed the need for common EU action: people are now looking to the EU for solutions and we must use the momentum.

The European Parliament embodies European democracy in action. In synergy with the institutional Conference process, in our strategy we should also focus on improving the European Parliament's legitimacy, its relevance in citizens' everyday lives and its capability to take decisions efficiently.

The Conference on the Future of Europe, at least in the first months, will most likely take place in form of hybrid events. The new format has advantages, such as a gain in outreach and accessibility and a reduced CO2 use, but can also face difficulties, since the audience will be harder to capture, with fewer opportunities for networking.

In this regard, we also have to consider the context of the current relations between the European institutions and citizens, with particular view at the impact of Covid, the fragmentation and overload of the information landscape, including disinformation phenomena, the fast-paced technological developments, the knowledge deficits.

Following the delay in 2020 in starting the Conference process, enough time is needed for a proper consultation with citizens and therefore we consider that the timeframe of the Conference process could be extended until 2023.

## **Objectives in the interaction with citizens**

The Conference on the Future of Europe is a great opportunity, after the strong pro-European result of the 2019 elections, to keep engaging with citizens and to listen to their direct inputs, so as to translate them in concrete actions on the future directions of the EU, via innovative methods of communication and participation.

The Conference process cannot simply result in the sum of 27 national initiatives, hence we need to shape a true European process, by going beyond national debates. At the same time, we must reach out beyond the institutional stakeholders and directly target citizens and organized civil society.

We have to ensure that the Conference on the Future of Europe turns into an innovative and ambitious way of engaging with citizens. Feedback is crucial if we want to implement the objective of a meaningful participation and show that “this time is different”.

As requested by the European Parliament in its resolution of January 2020, it is a priority to establish and empower Citizens (and Youth) Agoras in permanent interaction with the institutional bodies, and to enable them to influence the agenda setting of the Conference.

With the goal of bringing the EU closer to people, we must be able to transfer our policy priorities by highlighting what the EU can do for citizens’ daily lives, as well as by showing that we are able to transform their proposals into reality.

Within this framework, a positive narrative is a key tool in the goal of stopping blaming Europe for what is decided also - and sometimes only - by Member States

A successful Conference process can be a landmark and a starting point in opening new forms of interaction with citizens, including through European online consultations. Indeed, we believe this exercise can also represent a first step towards a more structured and permanent participatory way to influence EU policymaking.

The S&D Group has to be in the driving seat to ensure these aims.

## **Target groups**

The S&D Strategy on the Conference on the Future of Europe will embody a wide process of open participation targeting all groups of society. We aim at addressing all citizens, with the goal of promoting active engagement in democracy no matter where, from the most local levels to the European dimension.

Our targets are citizens in their diversity in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, nationality and socio-economic background. A one-size-fits-all approach is not the most appropriate solution and therefore we will adapt the outreach strategy to our target groups, also through thematic events and online consultations.

We should approach in particular those that are more excluded from the usual communication campaigns, to rebalance the perception of the European institutions targeting only a particular

group of citizens, while remaining attractive for active citizens in European organisations, trade unions' leaders, academics, students.

A special focus is required on young Europeans: the future of Europe affects them most, and therefore we suggest that they make-up at least 1/3 of the active and selected participants in our events.

As the most progressive political voice in the European Parliament, as S&D Group we have to prevent an underrepresentation of female citizens in the Conference as well as in our initiatives: a strong focus on female participation will be a key goal of our strategy.

Due to the hybrid format and to the likely scenario of having a great amount of online events, particular care has also to be taken in not to lose the older audience.

### **Policy priorities and institutional issues**

We see the Conference process as an open-ended process, with no pre-defined topics for reflections nor conclusions.

The scope of our political priorities should be focused on big transnational challenges, such as inequalities, health and pandemics, climate change, migration, digitalisation, fair taxation.

The following progressive policy priorities can be presented, in order to set starting-points for our discussion with the citizens:

- matters of real interest, such as fighting the pandemic, employment and decent wages, housing, eradicating poverty, culture and education,
- economic recovery and new models of social and environmental sustainability after Covid, including the European Green Deal and just transition, as well as its social dimension such as social rights and gender equality,
- new EU health competences and defending the creation of a strong Health Union,
- new competences for a real common EU industrial policy, transnational energy and transport infrastructure as well as tourism,
- sustainable cohesion policy,
- rule of law,
- digital transition,
- strengthening the role and leadership of the EU in the world,
- resilience of the EU,
- enhancing European democracy against the current challenges.

Without pre-empting the scope and content of the citizens' debates, as S&D Group we can define an entry position on some outstanding issues, as defined in the approved paper on the constitutional future of Europe, such as:

- extending qualified majority voting and activating passerelle clauses;
- supporting the community method,
- reforming the macro-economic governance framework, including the Stability and Growth Pact,
- introducing the right of initiative for the Parliament,
- including the Social Progress Protocol and European Pillar of Social Rights in the Treaties.

The Covid crisis shows that policies are more effective if better coordinated, therefore we have to be vocal in asking extraordinary and joint European solutions.

We should highlight the need to strengthen the "quality and quantity" of European democracy, starting with the role of the Parliament. In this regard, we could also encourage the EP to develop its common position on these matters as an input to the Conference.

We cannot take seriously Council's insistence on its decisive role on the outcome. On the contrary, the three EU Institutions must work together to turn the Conference's conclusions into concrete actions and legislative proposals and, if a clear position should emerge, suggest the Treaty changes necessary to implement them. Any reforms that will come out of the Conference process must be built on a broad consensus among the EU institutions, with the European Parliament at the centre of this process.

### **Interaction with elected representatives at local and national level**

The Conference process can also serve the purpose of closing the gaps that we observe today in the EU: North-South, East-West, big vs small countries, European Union vs Member States and local levels, urban vs rural. For the same reason, it is important to include all Member States - including candidate countries - and represent all political voices in the organisation as well as in the debates of the Conference process.

We need a new approach and a new alliance with national parliaments: they are our allies, not our rivals, neither are they enemies of more EU integration.

The Conference, ultimately, is also an opportunity to strengthen the role of regions - including the outermost ones - and cities in the institutional and political functioning of the EU. More emphasis should therefore be given to the contribution of local democracy and to their representations in Europe. A bottom-up Europe, starting by involving citizens and local levels, should acknowledge the important role of cities and regions as future pillars of the EU.