

SPINELLI MANIFESTO

Strengthening democracy and solidarity for a better future of the European Union

More than 70 years after the Schuman declaration laid down the foundations of the European Union and more than 10 years after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, we need a visionary and ambitious plan for the next step of the European integration process. Today we have to lay down the foundations of a reform that strengthens European democracy and solidarity and that paves the way for a better future of the European Union. This time citizens should play the key role in the discussion about the future of EU.

The European Union started as the European Coal and Steel Community with six founding Member States that agreed on a common regulation of their industrial production. What we have witnessed ever since is a steady increase of the number of Member States and more political and economic integration that have brought peace, prosperity and an increasing sense of European identity.

However, while its competences have evolved over time, they do not match the responsibility of the European Union for the increasingly complex challenges of our time, such as the rule of law, climate urgency, the inhumane management of arriving migrants, increasing social inequalities or the democratic deficit of financial and monetary policies. Overall, an update is required on the policies, resources, decision-making procedures and democratic legitimacy of the European Union. Therefore, we Members of the Spinelli Group regard the Conference on the Future of Europe as a great chance for an innovative and participatory reflection process based on the involvement of European citizens for a European Union that is more democratic and capable to give concrete answers - to their needs and dreams.

We hope that the Conference on the Future of Europe will provide a framework for discussions about the priorities of both citizens and institutional representatives without a predetermined outcome and without limiting the scope to pre-defined policy areas. The involvement of citizens in pan-European debates by means of dedicated citizens' panels and the bottom-up approach it ensures is what differentiates the Conference on the Future of Europe from previous initiatives. Citizens selected according to representative criteria to represent EU citizens in their diversity should be able to openly express their expectations, priorities but also their criticism and be heard by and answered to by political decision-makers so that their ideas and recommendations are taken into account.

We believe the Conference on the Future of Europe should concentrate its reflections on the options of possible deeper political integration of the EU first of all by highlighting the EU added value, the cost of non-Europe, the goal of preserving EU values and unity as well as enhancing the citizens' role and rights. The EU project needs to be re-focused on what it promises to citizens, to put their well-being at the centre by improving their living and working conditions.

While respecting the open-ended process of the Conference, we believe that the European Parliament should play a leading role during the Conference and we encourage it to put forward its own proposals on the reform of the Union, also on the basis of the important reports on the future of Europe approved in the 2014-2019 mandate.

We, Members of the Spinelli Group, call for these key policy areas to be discussed during the Conference on the Future of Europe:

- **Strengthening democracy**

The European Union should guarantee stronger involvement of citizens beyond European elections, for example, when it comes to appointments of key positions in European institutions. To this end, we want to anchor the lead candidate system firmly by giving each EU citizen the possibility to directly vote for one of the lead candidates put forward by the European Political Parties and add to the European electoral law a proportional element with equal voting rights for each EU citizen (transnational lists). We need to transform the Council into a true legislative chamber, thus creating a genuinely bicameral legislative system involving the Council and Parliament, with the Commission acting as the executive. Specialised legislative Council configurations could function in the future as preparatory bodies for a single legislative Council, both of which would meet in public, along similar lines to the functioning of the committees of the European Parliament, with all final legislative decisions being taken in the single legislative Council. A truly democratic European Union requires a fully-fledged right of initiative of the European Parliament that would considerably increase its agenda-setting power.

- **Reforming the Economic and Monetary Union and investing in European common goods**

It is of key importance that the institutional structure of the Economic and Monetary Union becomes more effective and democratically accountable. Social, political and economic cohesion must be strengthened. The EU has to continue what the Next Generation EU investment plan has begun. When more EU investment is set up, the European Parliament's co-decision and oversight must be strengthened to guarantee its use for a European added value. Moreover, the democratic governance of the Economic and Monetary Union should be strengthened through a parliamentary dimension of the Eurogroup. We aim for a Eurogroup president accountable to the European Parliament. To strengthen European democratic decisions about the EU budget, any future MFF must align to the five-year parliamentary term. To finance European investments, we use all European means to fight against tax fraud, tax evasion and tax avoidance, as well as for financial transparency for taxation purposes. The EU faces huge economic, social and societal transitions that requires an economic framework for a just transition and the implementation of a green and social deal.

- **Protecting EU fundamental rights**

The European Union is not just a common market, it is first and foremost founded upon core European values. EU and its institutions should ensure that the rule of law is respected by all Member States. It is a matter of priority that all available instruments including the new Rule of Law and Fundamental Rights Mechanism including its conditionality mechanism on EU Funds is used for each case of a potential breach of the principles of the rule of law by a Member State. Where Member States do not comply with rulings of the European Court of Justice, measures must be used to their full potential to enforce the rule of law and to protect EU citizens including financial sanctions. In order to protect plurality of public opinion, we demand a legislative proposal setting up a European legal framework for non-profit organizations operating in the EU, offering the possibility to have a legal status at EU level.

- **Increasing the European Union's ability to act**

The European Union is currently not able to take adequate and effective action when needed both in terms of legislation and in terms of crisis management. The unanimity principle in Council is mainly responsible for delays, deadlocks or decisions that are based on the lowest common denominator when full-scale EU action is needed.

Therefore, the Council should reject the unanimity principle and decide by Qualified Majority Voting. To end blockades and speed up legislation, we want to introduce deadlines for Council to come to a position and to disclose the position of the different Member States on compromise proposals under discussion at least every few months.

• **Fostering European citizenship and a truly European public sphere**

Building on the solid foundations laid down by the Maastricht and Amsterdam treaties, the European citizenship has to be developed in order to strengthen the legitimacy of the European Union. The lowering of the voting age, pan-European gender equality for the candidates to the European Elections, a common electoral law and common electoral practices run in pair with the necessity to construct on the daily basis an European public sphere in order to denationalize the European debates. The Conference, featuring European citizens as core of the decision process should work on these fundamental questions. The creation of a European public sphere will be of key importance in this regard. Efforts by both public broadcasters and private initiative to create pan-European media platforms that share audio-visual content and enable transnational discourse should be encouraged. Such efforts should receive European co-financing and additional support for multilingualism.

• **Ensuring a proper follow-up**

In order to improve citizens' trust in the EU institutions, the follow-up of the Conference on the future of Europe has to be linked to their contribution in a transparent manner from the start. The outcome of the Conference needs to receive a proper and reasoned response from European institutions without undue delay. The EU institutions should commit themselves to turning the suggestions into legislative proposals and being fully open to potential treaty revisions.

The Conference provides an extraordinary opportunity to create jointly the vision of Europe that is fit for twenty first century. It is up to all of us, citizens, local and regional authorities, civil society organisations, national parliamentarians as well as the Members of European Parliament to take the responsibility for the success of this unprecedented European consultation process.

The outcome of the Conference on the Future of Europe should be based on the conclusions from the citizens' panels and the plenary of the Conference and contain proposals for concrete action on EU level, legislative initiatives or Treaty changes. If citizens support Treaty changes, their mandate should lead to the launch a Convention in line with Article 48 TEU.

We are open-minded and ready to discuss and find new consensus on the needed reforms. Pro-European forces must unite now for an agenda of re-launch and pave the way to open up a process of reforms with proposals aiming at increasing the EU's capability to act.

The Spinelli Group is the network of federalist-minded Members of the European Parliament. The Group aims to “find a federal majority among members of the European Parliament on important subjects” and reinvigorate the endeavour for federalisation of the European Union.