



## ***Our European Union - Time to be Bold, to Act, and to Deliver***

### **Proposal from the Former Members Association of the European Parliament (FMA) to the Conference on the Future of Europe**

The aim of this proposal, which is based on the reports and documents of the meetings of 22 April, 30 June, 12 October and 7 December 2021, and the rich, diverse contributions by individual members of the Former Members Association (FMA) and Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), is to achieve a broad consensus within the FMA and its Reflection Group on the Future of Europe for a contribution to the plenary session of the Conference on the Future of Europe (the 'Conference').

#### **Introduction**

*'J'ai toujours pensé que l'Europe se ferait dans les crises, et qu'elle serait la somme des solutions qu'on apporterait à ces crises.'* (Jean Monnet, *Mémoires*, Paris, Fayard, 1976, p. 488)

At this time of severe crisis, it is more important now than ever before that the European Union (EU), which finds itself being challenged both from within and outside its Member States, reflect on its future. Former MEPs, coming together under the aegis of the FMA, can contribute from a particular point of view, given their **expertise, experience and institutional and political memory** of the only EU institution that is directly elected by EU citizens.

The Conference is a unique opportunity to reflect on and drive the dialogue surrounding the EU's future in an open and inclusive way.

We believe that the Conference should concentrate on broad questions related to European integration, the ways in which the EU can be more efficient, increase its capacity to act and deliver what citizens expect, and how the rule of law can be better protected, without excluding the possibility of Treaty change. We also hope that some interinstitutional questions, such as the future of the so-called *Spitzenkandidaten* system, will be settled and that lessons will be learnt from the EU's latest crisis, namely the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

We need to do more. Therefore, as former MEPs, we want to be bold, as this chance for the EU to be more ambitious in the future should not be wasted.

With this in mind, we have decided to present five general guidelines that the EU should follow in developing its future politics and policies.

Furthermore, we have compiled a list of 10 concrete proposals on the direction in which the EU should develop, or, in other words, the areas in which an initiative needs to be taken.

#### **Five general guidelines:**

1. Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union states that the EU 'is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail'. In order to ensure credibility both within and outside the EU, the Union's basic values and principles, as defined above, should not be compartmentalised by limiting them to specific policy areas, but instead mainstreamed as much as possible, through credible and effective enforcement mechanisms, in all actions taken by the EU.

2. In order to deliver on citizens' expectations, there must be political will to grant to the EU the capacity to act, both in terms of rules (to avoid deadlock) and resources. This is key to the Union's success, linking citizens' priorities with the tools and means necessary in various areas of competence, thus closing the unfortunate gap between expectation and delivery, and between ambitious declarations and underwhelming results. Rather than debating about more or less Europe, the guiding principle should

be that the EU is given what it needs in order to be able to act in line with citizens' expectations.

3. All of the tools and means that are currently provided for in the Treaties should be used, including the several opportunities that have so far gone unseized<sup>1</sup>, not least the possibility of Treaty change, which should always seek to further strengthen the institutions' accountability and the EU democratic system, in particular as regards the role of Parliament and the capacity to reach a decision within the Council, thus eliminating the possibility for each Member State to exercise a veto.

4. All initiatives taken by the EU should incorporate its broad policy goals, rather than run counter to them. In other words, the EU's policies should reconcile economic interests (i.e. growth and prosperity) with social protection (i.e. welfare and well-being), thus forming a competitive social market economy, while also taking into account high environmental and climate protection standards. Indeed, mitigation of and adaptation to climate change are emerging as a global challenge that requires our societies to be restructured in their entirety to enable the adoption of more sustainable and inclusive models. The political, legal and financial means should be given to the EU to continue leading in this area.

5. EU democracy should be strengthened at all levels (local, regional and national), while respecting the principle of subsidiarity, through the more structured participation of individual citizens and civil society organisations, and a greater focus on the transparency and accessibility of EU decision-making. Such participation is intended to weaken neither the role of the European Parliament and national parliaments nor the electoral process. On the contrary, participative and representative democracy should be interpreted as two mutually reinforcing principles. The role of European political parties should be strengthened, especially during the European Parliament elections.

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<sup>1</sup> For commentary on untapped Treaty articles, see: European Parliament resolution of 16 February 2017 on improving the functioning of the European Union building on the potential of the Lisbon Treaty (OJ C 252, 18.7.2018): <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52017IP0049>.

## Ten concrete proposals:

1. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has shown us, among other things, the need for more solidarity among the Member States especially in emergency situations. Mechanisms for mutual support and short-term assistance in the area of health should be organised at EU level. In that respect, the solidarity that overtook the so-called coronationalism of the initial Member State-oriented response, coupled with the shared successes evidenced in fighting the pandemic, should be used as a basis for more permanent solutions. In other words, the most pressing question should be: will the EU be better prepared when the next major disaster or crisis strikes?<sup>2</sup>.
2. In a world where individual Member States cannot compete with global superpowers, which act unilaterally, a genuine foreign- security- and defence policy of the EU should be developed by availing of qualified majority voting (QMV) more frequently in the Council (e.g. for the imposition of sanctions) and by using all flexibility instruments of the treaty including permanent structured cooperation (PESCO) to avoid deadlocks. A common and operational defense capacity has to be developed so that the EU - or its member states - can react in situations of emergency or crisis (e.g. Kabul airport). In these circumstances the European pillar of the North Atlantic Alliance (NATO) should be strengthened. This is what citizens expect of the EU. It is only a matter of political will. A shift towards QMV in the area of foreign affairs would transform the Member States from veto players into honest brokers who should be able to reach consensus on sensitive and critical issues.
3. Based on the experience with NextGenerationEU, the Union should be able to further develop and decide on its own resources, like at any other level of government. In other words, the EU should enjoy fiscal autonomy, i.e. be able to collect money on

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<sup>2</sup> See the amendment that was put forward by, among others, Elmar Brok during the Convention on the Future of Europe (2001-2003), in which the addition of 'the combating of public health threat of a significant cross-border nature' was proposed as a shared EU competence: <http://european-convention.europa.eu/docs/Treaty/pdf/12/global12.pdf> (page 11). See, also, the references to public health as a shared competence in the final report of Working Group XI on Social Europe (Brussels, 3 February 2003: <http://european-convention.europa.eu/pdf/reg/en/03/cv00/cv00516-re01.en03.pdf>), such as in 'the current Article 152 [Treaty establishing the European Community (Treaty of Nice, consolidated version)] should be enlarged so as to give the Union more competences in the field of public health and cover matters such as grave cross-border threat, communicable diseases, bioterrorism and WHO Agreements' (page 15).

the financial markets by issuing bonds (borrowing capacity), including outside the Recovery and Resilience Facility, and raise EU-wide taxes linked to its competences<sup>3</sup>. The extending of the instruments created by NextGenerationEU should be discussed in the context of the mid-term review of the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027. A return to national balanced budgets could be accompanied by increased borrowing at EU level to take on national investments. Furthermore, these new steps should be enshrined in the Treaties. Additionally, parliamentary control by the European Parliament should be extended beyond expenditure to cover revenue as well. The overall budget of the EU should reflect its ambitions. One cannot aspire to great policies, less still be bold in action, when hindered by modest means.

4. Digitalisation should be inclusive – leaving nobody behind – and protective of the EU's citizens and the Member States. The EU should take the lead in fighting cybercrime, especially from third countries. Disinformation and the spread of fake news systematically undermine our values and principles, and should, therefore, be considered as a crime against democracy. The EU should help safeguard a safe e-space for all Member States and at all levels of government.

5. There is a need for more European education and information, in particular for the young generations, especially through the development of multilingual and digitally accessible pedagogic materials, for all citizens on the history of Europe, based, in particular, on transnational perspectives<sup>4</sup>, and on European integration and the EU democratic system.

6. More should be done to protect the rule of law, especially with regard to current Member States. The EU cannot credibly demand high standards and exemplary conduct of candidate countries, let alone point out deficiencies in third countries, if its own Member States do not act in accordance with its basic values and principles. The EU should therefore develop and fully apply in all Member States a number of rule-of-law enforcement instruments.

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<sup>3</sup> 'If we want this revolutionary package to turn into a true "Hamiltonian moment" that Europe badly needs, we have to try and keep the momentum, by finding a way to prolong the borrowing capacity beyond the crisis, and to transfer gradually its resources from national budgets relief to EU policies funding.' (Alain Lamassoure, 10 November 2021).

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, House of European History: <https://historia-europa.ep.eu/en/mission-vision>.

7. Geopolitical instability, the worldwide competition for natural resources, the EU's dependence on energy imports from third countries and the impact of climate change policies all emphasise the need for a true energy union. Obstacles to internal market integration should be removed, there should be coordination between national policies and the role of energy should be incorporated into the EU's foreign policy, in order to stimulate renewable energy sources within the EU and provide affordable energy and a highly secure energy supply for all its citizens and companies.

8. The Spitzenkandidaten system should be enforced, first and foremost by Parliament itself. The future of the system depends primarily on Parliament's willingness to take a stance vis-à-vis the European Council. In order to strengthen the *Spitzenkandidaten* system, the introduction of transnational lists – with a limited number of seats as long as it does not create first- and second-class MEPs – is considered. For the nomination and the election of the Commission President the number of the seats of the groups in the Parliament is decisive in which all MEPs count equal. In any case, the closeness of representatives to their constituents and the extent to which citizens identify with MEPs should be strengthened.

9. As the second chamber of the EU legislature, the Council should do more to make its deliberations visible and transparent. This chamber should behave as a single public body, in which all final decisions are taken, with meetings open to all citizens, similar to Parliament.

10. A true European perspective for the Western Balkans countries is needed<sup>5</sup>. This can be done only via a concrete and detailed roadmap, accompanied by a strict timetable. In this way, conditionality would be strengthened on both sides: candidate countries would know what to do and when to do it in order to become a member of the EU, while Member States would be encouraged to comply with the enlargement prospects they have agreed upon and to strengthen the EU's integration capacity, especially in its decision-making processes.

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<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, the EP's press release of 25 March 2021: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20210322IPR00528/enlargement-reports-meps-fully-support-western-balkans-european-future>.

Contribution adopted on 8 December 2021 by the FMA Management Committee composed of:

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