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CUARTO EXAMEN TURNO LIBRE

In 2019, aiming to revitalise EU democracy and bring the institutions closer to citizens and inspired by an idea first voiced by French President Emmanuel Macron, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen proposed a conference on the future of Europe. Parliament, Council and the Commission began shaping their views on what the conference should look like and on how to follow up on its conclusions. This preparatory process was unexpectedly lengthy however owing not only to the outbreak of the pandemic, which inevitably redirected the attention of Council, the Commission and Parliament to essential coronavirus-containment measures, but also to difficulties in finding common ground on certain key aspects, such as the governing bodies and chair of the conference. A joint declaration was signed on 10 March 2021 by the presidents of three institutions, marking the conclusion of the preparatory phase. The inauguration of the conference is expected to take place on 9 May 2021.

Meanwhile, 19 April 2021 saw the launch of the conference's multilingual platform, a hub that will give people and civil society organisations the opportunity to host and attend events and share ideas on the future of Europe. Although institutional contributions and debates on the topic of the future of Europe are not new in EU circles, it is the first time since the Lisbon Treaty reform that a structured discussion of this amplitude has taken place with the simultaneous presence of the three institutions – Commission, Parliament and Council, the participation of national parliaments and the substantial involvement of the general public.

The joint declaration draws ideas from the positions expressed by the three institutions and represents a true compromise of wishes and positions. It stresses the need for the conference to address current challenges such as the green and digital transition, the social contract and the competitiveness of EU industry. The conference should also address inequalities and social fairness, face and respond to geopolitical challenges, and promote European values in an increasingly complex and turbulent world. The joint declaration considers the conference an opportunity for EU citizens to debate the Union's challenges and priorities in a new space and to have a say on the future of Europe.

Drawing on this ambitious objective, the joint declaration puts the spotlight on the role of citizens and solemnly commits the three presidents to follow up on the recommendations that the conference generates, fully respecting the principles of subsidiarity, proportionality and respective competences. The Conference is based on four pillars: the multilingual platform, citizens' panels, the plenary and the executive board. The focus remains on citizens and on a bottom-up approach that should develop throughout the conference, by means of events and pan-EU debates, all facilitated by a multilingual platform. European citizens' panels are thought to allow transnational forums and will be representative of the EU population in terms of age, gender, socio-economic background, geographical origin and level of education. The panels will hold debates that will feed into the conference plenary, with recommendations for the EU institutions to follow up. Additional events may be organised in the form of national citizen's panels. Common principles and criteria in the form of a conference charter should apply to any event organised within the conference. A lean governance structure, which should be gender balanced, should support the conference with an executive board representing the three institutions equally, each having three representatives and up to four observers. The presidential troika of the Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs of Parliaments of the European Union would have observer status, together with the CoR, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and representatives of other EU bodies and social partners. The executive board, deciding by consensus, will be made up of representatives of Parliament, Council and the Commission and report to the joint presidency, with the task of organising the work of the conference, its processes and events, and preparing conference plenary sessions, including citizens' input and the follow up to it.