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Making the Conference on the Future of Europe a Success

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On the day, two years after French President Emmanuel Macron proposed a conference on the future of Europe in a campaign speech, the then elected European Parliament gave its consent to the joint declaration on 4 March 2021. In the declaration, the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council of the EU agree on key points of the »Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE)«. It will start on 9 May 2021 and last until Spring 2022, to be concluded before the next French presidential elections. On a number of important aspects, the three institutions could not reach agreement. The executive board of more than 25 members and observers, which manages the conference, has to solve these issues as soon as possible as the timeframe is too limited. The board's most urgent tasks include:

- establishing itself as a smooth functioning conference leadership to cope with time pressure;
- organising a listening phase, in which citizens – not EU institutions – set the agenda;
- agreeing on the exact composition and working procedures of the conference, allowing for concrete outcomes to be delivered in less than one year;
- establishing a conference structure that creates political ownership by the EU institutions, national governments and parliaments;
- designing a methodology for the European citizens' panels which fosters deliberation and can be implemented under restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic;
- establishing a forum for organised civil society to participate in the CoFoE debates, possibly managed by the European Economic and Social Committee;
- ensuring that the outcome of the conference will have an impact on the future of Europe and EU policies.

If the board succeeds with preparing the conference until May 2021, the CoFoE can be turned into a ground-breaking experiment of transnational deliberative democracy. Especially involving the Councils in EU-level deliberative democracy, creating a new form of Intergovernmentalism, could prove to be a major step forward, as national governments are sceptical of citizens' and civil society's participation in EU decision-making.

However, even if the executive board manages to set up the conference within the given framework, it is less ambitious than the »European Convention 2.0« envisioned by the European Parliament. Therefore, the lesson to be learned by the European Parliament for the next European elections is: Do not trust election bids of a nominee for Commission Presidency who owes their nomination to the European Council. It should therefore stand firm on making the »Spitzenkandidaten« system mandatory until 2024 to address the leftovers of the CoFoE in a sequel to the debate on the future of Europe.

The long-expected Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) will be finally kicked off on 9 May 2021 and is invited »to reach conclusions by Spring 2022« (Council of the EU 2021b: 3). This timeframe puts the executive board responsible for the conference management under enormous pressure to find an agreement on all issues not resolved in the joint declaration. Preparing the whole conference in about two months is an ambitious task. If the executive board does not come up with solutions soon, the CoFoE could do more harm than good to the European project by frustrating even its most devoted supporters.

However, even if the executive board manages to set up the conference within the given framework, it is less ambitious than the »European Convention 2.0« envisioned by the European Parliament. The shared presidency of three, the limitation of the conference's outcome to a report, a minimum of just two plenary sessions and the short timeframe do not allow for coming up with a comprehensive reform package to address all left-overs from previous unfinished reforms and newly mounting reform needs.

Thus, there is already one lesson for the European Parliament to be learned for the European elections in 2024: Do not trust election bids – here the proposal to organise the CoFoE – of a nominee for Commission Presidency who owes their nomination to the European Council. If the European Parliament wants the urgent reform needs to be addressed, the best option is to stand firm on making the »Spitzenkandidaten« system mandatory until 2024. A Commission President who owes their presidency to the EU citizens and the European Parliament will be a better ally to pressure hesitant governments to make the EU more efficient and democratic.

Despite all justified criticism, the joint presidency can still turn the CoFoE into a ground-breaking experiment of transnational deliberative democracy. This would create a new form of intergovernmentalism, where the legitimation of the Council system does not exclusively rest on national elections, but draws additional legitimacy from deliberative processes. Involving the Councils in EU-level deliberative democracy could prove to be a major step forward, as the member state governments were hesitant in introducing instruments for citizens' and civil society's participation in EU decision-making in the past. In order to turn the CoFoE into such a fruitful bottom-up reflection on the EU's current priorities, the executive board needs to swiftly complete the following tasks:

- establish itself as a smooth functioning conference leadership to cope with the time pressure;
- organise a listening phase, in which citizens – not EU institutions – set the agenda;
- agree on the exact composition and working procedures of the conference, allowing for concrete outcomes to be delivered in less than one year;
- design a methodology for the European citizens' panels which fosters deliberation and can be implemented under the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic;
- establish a forum for organised civil society to participate in the CoFoE debates;
- ensure that the outcome of the conference will have an impact on the future of Europe and EU policies.

The *first section* of this paper reviews the interinstitutional negotiations since the then candidate for Commission President Ursula von der Leyen proposed the idea of a CoFoE in the European Parliament. It concludes that there are three contradictory interpretations of the CoFoE: (1) The conference as an election bid; (2) the conference as a »Convention 2.0«; and (3) the conference as a new form of »Intergovernmentalism 3.0« legitimised by deliberative citizens' participation. The *second section* assesses the joint declaration on the CoFoE (Council of the EU 2021b). It concludes that the CoFoE will be less ambitious than the European Parliament hoped for. However, due to the joint declaration's vagueness and a number of improvements compared to the Council position, there is still the chance to turn the CoFoE into a ground-breaking experiment of transnational deliberative democracy. The *third section* provides recommendations on how to achieve this goal and turn the CoFoE into a fruitful bottom-up reflection on the EU's current priorities.

THE COFOE AN ADVERSE EVENT?

Since 2019, when the then candidate for the Presidency of the European Commission von der Leyen promised to hold a CoFoE to the European Parliament, the Parliament was the only main EU institution constantly supporting that idea. It clearly hoped for a »European Convention 2.0« and developed detailed recommendations to organise citizens' and civil society participation (European Parliament 2021). The European Commission sought to water down von der Leyen's bid to the Parliament by remaining mostly vague and silent on the topic. The Council pulled the brakes, as national governments are either against or afraid of any serious attempt to reform the EU. Few of them seem to be convinced by the idea of turning the CoFoE into an »Intergovernmentalism 3.0«,[1] where deliberative fora generate additional legitimacy for the European Council's Strategic Agenda.

THE COFOE A »EUROPEAN CONVENTION 2.0«?

As the CoFoE was part of von der Leyen's bid to the European Parliament in exchange for abandoning the »Spitzenkandidaten system« in 2019, it is obvious why the Parliament was a first-mover in laying out its ideas on the CoFoE. Attaching great importance to the CoFoE, with the Committee on Constitutional Affairs (AFCO) as an internal driver, it adopted an ambitious position for the interinstitutional negotiations as early as 15 January 2020 (European Parliament 2020a). In April (European Parliament 2020b), May (European Parliament 2020c), June (European Parliament 2020d) and November 2020 (European Parliament 2020e), it reaffirmed its expectations to organise an »ambitious, interactive and inclusive conference«

1 Following the »New Intergouvernmentalismus«(Bickerton/Hodson/Puetter 2014), it would be a version 3.0 of Intergouvernmentalism.

(European Parliament 2020d), which had not become obsolete despite the pandemic.

The European Parliament's position is more ambitious than the other two institutions'. It envisions a conference setup very close to the »Convention on the Future of Europe« (Göler 2006), which drafted the »Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe«. The Parliament clearly supports the idea of treaty change and lists a number of policy and institutional challenges which shall be subject to debates in the CoFoE. There is a clear reference to the Parliament's 2017 »Verhofstadt report«, which calls for a new treaty reform (European Parliament 2017). However, the Parliament does not want the scope of the conference to be predefined, but unlimited. The Parliament is also the most ambitious institution concerning the follow-up on the CoFoE. It demands that EU institutions turn recommendations into actions and set a timeframe for becoming active. For the European Parliament, the CoFoE is the arena to finally overcome the reform backlog accumulated in recent years – not least because the previous debate on the future of Europe, the European Commission's white paper process, was never concluded (Klein/Plottka/Tittel 2018: 144–147).

The European Parliament's proposal for the conference structure resembles the convention foreseen under the ordinary revision procedure of Art. 48 Treaty on European Union (TEU). Concerning citizens' involvement, the Parliament proposes an update to the convention, which draws lessons from the 2002–03 European Convention as well as recent deliberative panels on the European and member state level. According to the Parliament, the conference agenda should be based on the outcomes of citizens' deliberations and a special Eurobarometer during a listening phase prior to the CoFoE. The conference itself should be complemented by transnational citizens' and youth agoras of randomly selected participants. They should debate questions agreed by the conference plenary, in which the agoras are represented by delegates. The parliament underlines the need for a coherent methodology for the agoras in all member states, while additional citizens' panels and citizens' dialogues could be organised. The European Parliament also demanded the participation of civil society and non-governmental organisations in addition to the representation of the social partners and the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) in the plenary. However, it did not foresee an official forum for civil society.

The European Parliament was not able to succeed with its vision for a new »European Convention 2.0«. However, by providing detailed recommendations for the CoFoE, the European Parliament (2021) was able to improve the joint declaration with regard to the involvement of citizens and civil society. In the executive board, the Parliament's three representatives and up to four observers will need to further make their point to achieve an appropriate methodology for the citizens' panels.

THE COFOE, JUST A BID TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT?

Despite the fact that the Commission President had set the CoFoE on Brussels' agenda, the watering down of the election bid begun before the Commission (2020a) adopted its communication on the CoFoE on 22 January 2020. Its political guidelines stipulate that the CoFoE must have a »clear scope and clear objectives« (von der Leyen 2019: 19). While emphasising a focus on the »EU's headline ambitions« (European Commission 2020a: 2), in its communication of January 2020, the European Commission supported two strands of the debate in the CoFoE: one on policies, and one on institutional matters. The latter should at least cover a debate on transnational lists and the »Spitzenkandidaten« system. Later that year, Commission Vice-President for Democracy and Demography Dubravka Šuica backed down on institutional reforms by stating: »I am sure that nobody will be interested in the Spitzenkandidaten system«. »Healthcare and Brussels' response to the public health crisis will now need to be put at the forefront of the dialogue on the future of the EU« (Hopkins/Fleming 2020).

The European Commission agrees with the European Parliament that the CoFoE has to be »followed up with real action and tangible results« (European Commission 2020a: 6). By calling for a feedback mechanism to turn ideas into concrete actions, the Commission addresses one of the most problematic deficits of current EU-level participative democracy (Plottka/Müller 2020: 16). Nevertheless, the European Commission's own commitment to deliver on the conference results remains limited to »tak[ing] into account citizens' feedback and proposals in the setting of its legislative agenda« (European Commission 2020a: 6).

The Commission's ambitions with regard to citizens' participation also remain vague. Its communication focuses on citizens' dialogues and outreach activities. Therefore, it remains unclear how committed the Commission is to turn communication activities into political participation.

The white paper process initiated by the Juncker Commission shows that the European Commission has the power to initiate a transnational debate on the future of Europe, even against the will of national governments (Klein/Plottka/Tittel 2018: 144–147). However, the current Commissions' handling of the CoFoE makes it unlikely that it will support the European Parliament against the Council of the EU in the executive board of the CoFoE.

THE COFOE, »INTERGOVERNMENTALISM 3.0«?

Even though the conference is the brainchild of the French President Emmanuel Macron, who proposed it during the campaign before the European elections in 2019, the Council of the EU (2020) was the last institution to agree on its position on the CoFoE in June 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic served as an excuse for the delay. However, it cannot explain a delay of more than one year from the European Parliament's resolution in January 2020 until the Council (2021a) revised its position in February 2021 to finally pave the way for the joint declaration. Only a lack of ambition or even unwillingness to kick-off the conference can explain such a delay, which undermined the credibility of the whole initiative.

Any ambition to turn the conference into a »Convention 2.0« for treaty reform is prevented by stating that the CoFoE does

not fall within the scope of Art. 48 TEU. The conference should produce a report to the European Council. »In light of [its] conclusions […], the EU institutions would commit to examine swiftly how to follow up effectively to this report, each within their own sphere of competence and in accordance with the Treaties« (Council of the EU 2020: 7). While the Council position is fully in line with a Franco-German Non-Paper (French Government/German Government 2019) leaked in November 2019, the German Chancellor Angela Merkel was more open to the idea of treaty reform (Gutschker 2020).

According to the Council – and in line with the non-paper – the thematic focus of the conference should be the Strategic Agenda of the European Council. The fact that the Council has also discovered deliberative democracy as a source of legitimacy results in contradictory positioning. On the one hand, citizens are supposed to deliberate on the topics of the Strategic Agenda; on the other hand, the Council has made clear that these priorities are already the results of citizens' dialogues and consultations and it did not signal any readiness to revise the Strategy based on the conference's outcome. Such a top-down approach to citizens' participation aims solely at confirming that the European Council has set the correct priorities. The fact that the Council does not propose a thorough concept for citizens' participation in the CoFoE, underlines the low priority of deliberative democracy to the member state governments.

A thorough methodology for the European citizens' panels, which allows participants to set the agenda of the CoFoE, could take EU's »New Intergovernmentalism« (Bickerton/Hodson/Puetter 2014) one step further. It could turn the CoFoE into an »Intergovernmentalism 3.0«, which provides the Council with additional legitimacy. As the strong emphasis on involving citizens in the CoFoE resembles Macron's response to the protests of the »gilets jaunes« (the French »Citizens' Convention for Climate«, Kopp 2019), it is likely that his proposal to organise such a conference was partly driven by the intention to generate additional legitimacy for his EU policy. In France, the citizens' convention provided him with the opportunity to compensate for the legitimising function of the disintegrated French party system. However, not many of the other governments seem to be convinced by his approach, but consider the CoFoE an adverse event causing unnecessary trouble.

THE JOINT DECLARATION: STILL AN OPPORTUNITY TO SAVE THE COFOE FROM OBLIVION?

Despite the many months needed to find agreement between the three institutions, the joint declaration remains vague on many aspects of the CoFoE. It delegates further decisions »regarding the work of the conference, its processes and events« (Council of the EU 2021b: 4) to the executive board. On the one hand, the discretion left to the executive board allows for flexibility and opens a window of opportunity to make the CoFoE a success and initiate a fruitful bottom-up reflection on the EU's current priorities. On the other hand, the short timeframe puts the executive board under enormous time pressure to decide on the remaining issues and implement the conference in just a couple of weeks. Due to the size of the executive board (see below), it is unlikely that decisions will be taken swiftly. However, to turn the CoFoE into a ground-breaking experiment of transnational deliberative democracy, the executive board has to address a number of issues.

THE CONFERENCE PLENARY

The composition of the conference plenary is one of the improvements compared to the »Convention on the Future of Europe«. Like in Art. 48 TEU, representatives from the European Parliament, the Council, the European Commission and national parliaments participate in the plenary. Associating the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy for discussions on international relations is sensible. However, given the importance of external relations to most policy areas, the High Representative should be one of the Commission's permanent representatives in the CoFoE.

By representing citizens on an equal footing in the plenary, the deliberative formats are directly linked to the conference plenary. Giving selected citizens equal participation rights is the best possible way to strengthen citizens' voice in the plenary debate. Furthermore, the Committee of the Regions (CoR), the EESC, the social partners and civil society are represented in the conference plenary. Regarding the objective of having a broad debate, their participation is a necessary step forward in the composition of the conference. The task ahead for the executive board lies in defining the number of representatives per institution and designing a transparent selection procedure for citizens and civil society organisations represented in the plenary. While the citizens' panels are organised under the authority of the three institutions, there is no official civil society forum from which representatives could be delegated to the plenary.

Concerning the working mode of the conference, the joint declaration stipulates only that it shall meet »at least every six months« (Council of the EU 2021b: 4). To come up with concrete results, the conference will have to convene more often than for the opening and the closing ceremony. Thematic working-groups would allow for more frequent meetings, more in-depth debates, and working on concrete recommendations. In order to commit the participating institutions to following up on the final recommendations, it is necessary that members of the plenary have an ownership of the conference outcome. The CoFoE must not be limited to an experiment of deliberative democracy, but the institutions have to consider it a common endeavour.

The executive board is responsible for drafting and publishing the conclusions. All structures shall find consensus on the »modalities for reporting on the outcomes of the various activities« (Council of the EU 2021b: 4). The plenary will have to agree on a decision procedure for the adoption of the conference report which will then be forwarded to the joint presidency. The options are either by consensus or – as discussed by the European Parliament (2020) – with a quadruple majority of representatives from all three major EU institutions and

national parliaments. Against the backdrop of member states' reluctance to engage with the conference, a consensus requirement would reward each government with a veto position to block proposals. Having the option of a majority decision with high thresholds minimises the risk that the CoFoE might fail in the end. Anyway, giving concrete recommendations above the lowest common denominator and finding the broadest possible consensus among participants will remain the major challenge during the CoFoE.

THE CONFERENCE PRESIDENTS AND THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

By assigning the chairmanship of the conference to three presidents, the CoFoE draws another lesson from the Convention on the Future of Europe. Initially tasked with drafting recommendations for a future treaty revision, its president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing decided to draft a complete constitution. His ambitions gave additional impetus to the project of a European constitution. Against the backdrop of the European Parliament's vision of a »European Constitution 2.0«, it is likely that member states were afraid of a federalist chairing the conference, who might have expanded the conference scope beyond the initial mandate. The joint chairmanship is a viable safeguard against any such ambitions and bears the risk of making the conference management inefficient.

The executive board, being tasked to draw the conclusions of the CoFoE, will most likely be the forum with most influence on the fate of the conference outcome. It is composed of three representatives and four observers per institution and the presidency of the »Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs of Parliaments of the European Union« (COSAC) as an observer. The CoR, the EEAS, other EU bodies and the social partners can be invited as additional observers. It remains to be seen whether an executive board of 9 members and 17 or more observers, which is supported by a secretariat of »limited size« will be able to swiftly manage the CoFoE.

CITIZENS' AND CIVIL SOCIETY INVOLVEMENT

Since 2001, the EU has become a global champion and democratic innovator in the area of participative governance (OECD 2018: 48ff.). Its instruments are more advanced than those of most of its member states. However, even to the European Union, deliberative democracy is a rather new area. Some studies assert that EU institutions, such as the comitology system (Neyer/Joergensen 1997), possess deliberative qualities. However, few of more than 1,500 citizens' dialogues organised by the Juncker Commission (European Commission 2019) allowed for qualitative deliberations. Most of them were rather outreach activities. Therefore, the strong focus on engaging citizens in the CoFoE and the debate about how to organise deliberative processes constitutes progress with regard to the EU maintaining its role as a democratic innovator.

Complementing the existing instruments of EU-level participative democracy with deliberative forums would allow for solving a long-standing problem. With the exception of the European Citizens' Initiative, few of the existing participative instruments address individual citizens. Most of them are designed to give interest groups and civil society organisations their say in EU decision-making. Separating participative democracy for civil-society actors and deliberative democracy for individual citizens, would allow for designing better targeted instruments. The CoFoE is an innovative experiment to learn how such instruments function on a transnational scale and how they can be integrated into EU-level representative and participative democracy.

The joint declaration foresees three categories of events: (1) European citizens' panels organised by the EU institutions on the European level, with specific events dedicated to young people; (2) events organised under a set of common principles with a number of different partners at different levels; and (3) additional events organised by member states and institutions. In addition, there is a multilingual digital platform to document all events and to offer citizens the opportunity to express their ideas. To make the experiment of transnational deliberative democracy a success, it must be transparent which events solely serve as outreach activities and which events fulfil (hopefully) high standards of deliberative democracy and have a direct representation in the conference plenary.

A forum dedicated to debates of organised civil society is not explicitly mentioned in the joint declaration. In addition to ongoing bottom-up initiatives, the EESC is the ideal partner for making up this deficit voluntarily. The EESC should organise a civil society forum as an event under category 2. This would also solve the problem of recruiting civil society organisations represented in the conference plenary. Participants in the civil society forum should not be limited to the usual EU-level suspects and recipients of EU-funding in the member states, but mirror the diversity of Europe's civil society, most notably in terms of geographical and thematic representativeness.

To make the deliberative panels a success, higher standards than just representativeness as foreseen in the joint declaration need to be defined. With regard to the selection of participants, the joint declaration does not codify random selection, which was proposed by the European Parliament. As it is still the best way to ensure that the selected group is not biased (on descriptive representation through random selection see Rabinder James 2009), the executive board should follow the Parliament's recommendation.

The true value of deliberative democracy is that it allows for non-hierarchical debates among equals, which are not overshadowed by power structures, assuming that such a setting will result in less interest- and more argument-driven conclusions. However, inviting neither elected representatives nor government officials, but citizens to a round table, does not ensure real deliberation. People have different abilities, some serve as advantages in discussions. The moderation of deliberative panels has to compensate for such a different allocation of abilities and create an environment of low thresholds to facilitate equal participation.

Under the restrictions of the pandemic, digital literacy and technical equipment are the major obstacle. On the one hand,

it has to be ensured that every citizen selected for participation can access the online meetings. On the other hand, current online meeting platforms challenge even some of their frequent users. Therefore, online meetings have to take place on technically less-demanding platforms, which can be handled intuitively. As soon as the CoFoE can switch to face-to-face meetings again, these have to be organised in a way to facilitate participation, including the provision of childcare, easily accessible locations, guaranteed job leave, and financial compensation (Geißel/Jung 2019: 7–8). In both types of meetings, online and offline, moderation has to consider the participants' different abilities and shield the debates from agenda-setting by the institutions.

THE SCOPE OF THE CONFERENCE AND ITS FOLLOW-UP

The definition of the conference scope in the joint declaration is a compromise between the two positions of the European Parliament and the Council. One the one hand, citizens are allowed to address any issue that matters to them: »The scope of the Conference should reflect the areas where the European Union has the competence to act or where European Union action would have been to the benefit of European citizens« (Council of the EU 2021b: 5). On the other hand, the three institutions list what they think should be addressed. To avoid the CoFoE to become a redundant exercise of discussing the already adopted political guidelines of the Commission and the Strategic Agenda of the European Council, the conference has to start with a listening phase, as the European Parliament has proposed. Before giving the deliberative events specific topics to discuss, the digital platform and a first round of events should be used to set the conference agenda. Which challenges matter most to citizens and should be addressed on a European level? If the CoFoE hands over the right to set the agenda to EU citizens, it will result in a more fruitful bottom-up reflection on the EU's current priorities.

The joint declaration also underlines that the EU institutions will handle the recommendations with respect to their own »competences and in accordance with the Treaties« (Council of the EU 2021b: 4). The Council will most likely read in the wording that Art. 48 TEU is off the table, because issues requiring treaty change are outside the EU's competences. The European Parliament will most likely read in the wording that it has the competence to propose treaty change in line with Art. 48 TEU. Therefore, the debate on initiating an EU reform (including institutional matters) will continue within the CoFoE.

In the end, an inappropriate follow-up to the conference bears the largest potential of frustrating citizens and strengthening Eurosceptics. There are strong expectations for the conference to deliver concrete results, not in terms of recommendations, but reforms and actions. If the institutions fail to deliver, the CoFoE will do more harm than good. However, there can be no guarantee that all recommendations will be implemented. Therefore, it is even more important that the institutions communicate which recommendations they implement and which not. For the latter, they have to give proper justifications, why they do not plan to become active. Being responsive to EU citizens is both, delivering on certain demands and justifying inactivity concerning other demands. The EU has always been better in doing the former, while neglecting the latter. If the institutions become more responsive to citizens' demands on the occasion of the CoFoE, that will constitute an additional positive side-effect of the conference.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO MAKE THE COFOE SUCCESSFUL

The previous assessment of the joint declaration has shown that it is innovative in some aspects and that even the Council has to face the task of making the EU more democratic. The strong focus of the joint declaration on citizens' involvement is a step in the right direction. The key points agreed among the three institutions, however, do not guarantee a success of the CoFoE. The executive board has to swiftly tackle the tasks mentioned, before the conference can start. To make it a success, the following recommendations should be considered:

1. **See the CoFoE as a prelude to the next European elections:** The resistance of the member states against an ambitious conference made clear that they will not allow for a »Convention 2.0«. Comparing it to the Council's previous attempt of initiating a debate on the future of Europe with the Bratislava declaration (European Council 2016), much has been achieved. This debate is broader and better organised than the previous one. Therefore, the new generation of MEPs in the AFCO committee dealing with the CoFoE, a number of them serving their first tenure, should see the CoFoE as an opportunity to change the debates on reforming the EU and overcoming the reform backlog step by step. The CoFoE will not be the last opportunity to address the urgent issues. However, they should stand firm on making the »Spitzenkandidaten« system mandatory until 2024. ***A Commission President elected by EU citizens and the European Parliament will be a better ally to pressure hesitant governments to make the EU more efficient and democratic.***

2. **Make the CoFoE a success in deliberative democracy:** Regardless of what the CoFoE could have been, organising the largest experiment of deliberative democracy on a transnational scale is a big opportunity for the EU to maintain its position as a democratic innovator. Therefore, ***it is up to the executive board to design appropriate deliberative processes***. The European Parliament's preparations are an excellent basis to start. Most notably, there has to be a listening phase to give citizens a true right to set the agenda. There should be a random selection of citizens. The technical obstacles for online-meetings as well as the organisational obstacles for face-to-face events have to be addressed in order to ensure equal opportunities to participate for all potentially selected citizens. The events need an excellent moderation, which facilitates the engagement of all participants and counterbalance power structures. Otherwise, the experiment of deliberative democracy will turn into another series of outreach events.

3. **Do not pit participative and deliberative democracy against each other:** The promotion of deliberative democracy may not come at the expense of participative democracy. While the former addresses individual citizens only, the EU-level instruments of the latter are better suited for interest groups and organised civil society. While the joint declaration acknowledges the importance of civil society and foresees its representation in the conference plenary, it does not propose a civil society forum. Therefore, ***the European Economic and Social Committee should step in and organise a Civil Society Forum under the umbrella of the CoFoE.***

4. **Establish a structure for the work of the conference plenary to ensure a sufficient follow-up through political ownership:** As time is running out until Spring 2022, the executive board has to decide on the composition of the conference plenary as soon as possible. To ensure that the institutions consider the CoFoE to be more than a venue for listening to reports from citizens, ***the conference plenary needs thematic working groups, which allow for in-depth debates and drafting of recommendations***. Within one year, there will be too few meetings of the plenary to complete these tasks in this too large forum. If the institutions do not develop an ownership in the process, there will be no sufficient follow-up to the CoFoE. As the commitment to follow-up activities in the joint declaration is modest at best, the institutions' responses could become the breaking point of the whole process.

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