

Conference on the Future of Europe: EP delegation sets out ambitious priorities

At the inaugural plenary session on Saturday in Strasbourg, MEPs set the tone for the Conference Plenary debates to follow.

During his opening statement, Parliament's Co-Chair of the [Executive Board](#), Guy Verhofstadt, said, "I see the Conference as a relay race. Citizens participating in panels will start it by defining their wishes and recommendations. Then, over several plenary sessions, they will hand over the baton and we will formulate concrete proposals for reform based on their recommendations. The final stage of this race is to approve and implement these reforms through our democratic institutions."

Watch the [statement by Guy Verhofstadt](#) or download the video with [all three Co-Chairs of the Executive Board](#).

Speeches by the Parliament's delegation set out a broad array of priorities. Most MEPs spoke about the Conference's potential for reform, with many putting forward proposals for treaty change. A few doubted the Conference is going in the right direction - some consider it too ambitious, others say it is not ambitious enough. Nevertheless, virtually all agreed that the EU needs to change in order to respond better to crises and tackle internal and external challenges, and that reaching out to all citizens and shaping their ideas into concrete proposals is a top priority.

You can find excerpts from MEPs' speeches below, and segments of the debate in the [multimedia package](#). An edited [video with excerpts](#) is also available. The entire session is available [here](#).

For more information on the day's programme and next steps, read our press release [here](#).

Manfred Weber (EPP, DE), said, "We need to discuss how to make Europe structurally fit for purpose. I doubt whether our foreign policy, for example, is strong enough to meet this challenge. There is the question of identity - diversity is potentially toxic if we use it against one another. [...] The continent's Christian nature is also important to me, and how we can shape Europe democratically."

Iratxe García Pérez (S&D, ES) highlighted that “we have a transnational community based on solidarity, prosperity and values. We have Erasmus students and trade unions, all sorts of different groups. We have to listen to all voices, and especially to those to whom we do not usually listen. [...] If the Union cannot solve citizens’ problems, it has no reason to exist.”

“If we are to be the guardians of EU values, such as the rule of law and individual freedoms, we really have to defend them. We want Europe to address all the crises that occur, effectively and quickly. A powerful, sovereign Europe respected by its partners and feared by its adversaries. [...] We need to look for new competences and skills for the Union. [...] It is time to move away from vetoes and unanimity rules”, pointed out **Pascal Durand** (Renew, FR).

Daniel Freund (Greens/EFA, DE) sounded the alarm about the rise of illiberalism in Europe and called on the EU to deliver “on the big challenges of our time: climate change, taxing big corporations, defending our interests in the world and our values at home. The reason why the EU is not delivering on those is a design flaw, and that is unanimity.”

Hélène Laporte (ID, FR) said, “Our citizens believe that our Union is not very democratic. So the members of the panels must be selected fairly, representing political plurality, and their ideas must be accepted. [...] We want a Europe of cooperation [...] respecting the sovereignty of member states in key areas such as health and social rights. The issue of immigration should not be avoided.”

Zdzisław Krasnodębski (ECR, PL) commented that: “The idea is to take a further step, to unify the member states, centralise some policies and take decisions together - perhaps undermining the principle of cohesion. [...] Very often from Brussels or Strasbourg you cannot really see the real Europe, with all its different cultural, economic and social aspects.”

“We need to organise against free trade agreements and competition, against imposing austerity instead of allowing people to make this green transition a social revolution, and we need to protect our public services. For this, we need treaty reform, but if the Council is already against it, what is the point of having this conversation?” wondered **Manon Aubry** (The Left, FR).

“With Next Generation EU, we showed courage but it is not yet enough. We need to overcome the obsolete fiscal compact, to make our common debt permanent, to put an end to unanimity, and to create a consistent federal budget to fight against our unacceptable inequalities”, declared **Fabio Massimo Castaldo** (NI, IT).

Further information

[Digital Platform for the Conference on the Future](#)

Contacts

Sanne DE RYCK

Press Officer

☎ (+32) 2 28 42531 (BXL)

☎ (+33) 3 881 64917 (STR)

📱 (+32) 498 98 34 51

✉ sanne.deryck@europarl.europa.eu

Kyriakos KLOSIDIS

Press Officer

☎ (+32) 2 28 32357 (BXL)

☎ (+33) 3 881 74651 (STR)

📱 (+32) 470 96 47 35

✉ kyriakos.klosidis@europarl.europa.eu
