



CALL FOR JOINING A CIVIL SOCIETY CONVENTION



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The Conference on the Future of Europe is due to kick off soon. In addition to a decentralised exercise with events at local and national levels to which civil society organisations will contribute, it will also include an interinstitutional conference plenary, which is supposed to also debate proposals and organise a follow up to the conference.

It is critical that organised European Civil Society, which means organisations involving and representing citizens operating on a pan-European level, is also engaged in this latter exercise, in line with article 11 of the Treaties according to which EU institutions must maintain an open, transparent and structured dialogue with civil society.

The Intergovernmental Conference preparing the constitutional Treaty in 2000 involved European networks of civil society organisations through a Civil Society Forum, and representatives of the Civil Society Forum were regularly invited at the conference. Also two plenary sessions of the IGC were dedicated to civil society. It would be inconceivable that the Conference on the Future of Europe, organised twenty years later, would have a more limited involvement of European civil society. However, while the Commission's proposal and the positions of the European Parliament and the Council indicate the important role of civil society, it is not clear how European civil society organisations will be involved in a structured manner. The main opposition from EU institutions relates to the lack of a unique civil society coordination, so that it is not clear to them which organisations they should invite.

It is nevertheless vital to ensure that next to a bottom up involvement of citizens and civil society organisations at local and national levels, there is a direct link between European civil society organisations and the Conference Plenary, to ensure coherence and follow up.

For this reason, Civil Society Europe, as the coordination for civil society organisations in Europe, we have established a Civil Society Convention.

In December we will invite all organisations that like us, are “working towards regenerating the European project around the shared values of Equality, Solidarity, Inclusiveness and Democracy”, recognise themselves in the declaration below and agree to reclaim a space for civil society organisations in the Conference on the Future of Europe to join the Convention by endorsing the declaration.

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An official kick-off event will be organised toward the end of February 2021 and EU institutions' main decision-makers on the COFOE will be invited to co-host the event. It will always be possible to join the Convention at a later stage. A Steering Committee and a spokesperson for the Convention will be nominated by the members of the Convention. The Steering Committee will prepare the draft agendas of the Conference and members will chair the meetings in turn.

Each organisation will be able to nominate two representatives in the Convention. The Convention will also include representatives from the Citizen's and Youth agoras. Organisations will also indicate how they want to contribute to the work of the Convention (e.g. by providing support for communication, meeting platforms, preparing documents and statements, etc).

At the first meeting, the Convention will agree on the key topics for discussion which will also include how to reform EU policies to reinforce participation of civil society in EU decision-making.

It will also establish a calendar of meetings in order to prepare written recommendations to the Conference Plenary, which will be presented by two representatives, nominated by the Convention.

The meetings reports will be public, and a website of the Convention will be created. If possible meetings will be webstreamed.

The Convention will also work with the services of the European Parliament to ensure, when restrictions of access to the European institutions will be lifted, to obtain meeting rooms in the European Parliament for meetings. Members of the Conference from EU Institutions will be invited regularly to the Convention meetings (whether physical or online) to exchange with European civil society networks. Also there should be an agreement to ensure that representatives of the Convention are invited to each session of the Plenary of the Conference on the Future of Europe with speaking rights. It should also be able to send comments to the draft agenda in advance of the plenaries. Civil Society Europe will provide the secretariat of the Convention including liaison with EU institutions.