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**“Joint Declaration as the first step to launch the
Conference on the Future of Europe”**

**Panel debate on "Sharing Ideas for a Meaningful
Conference on the Future of Europe".**

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(online)

2021 and 2022 are perfect time for this joint reflection on the future for Europe. These are the years of change, of reorientation touching upon many aspects of our life as citizens, of the functions of the Union, member states, regions, local communities.

My experience tells me that in times like this people tend to have their own views, opinions, reflections. They think about the future.

It is a good time for reflection on Europe also because technology allows us to gather relatively easily for such reflection.

2021 came after 2020, which affected all of us with a largely unknown experience and there are lessons to learn. One of these lessons is about the need to be better prepared for next shocks. We opened our eyes, looked around, also toward our future. When crises hit, it is all natural for us as human beings to see the need to be prepared for the next shock and this turns our interest toward the future.

There is a lot of economic challenges on our mind, we worry about financing, effective recovery. We share commitment to green and digital transition.

We focus on many concrete actions at European and national levels. I would say that there is a large amount of shared views about our destination but we do not know yet how to get there and here comes Europe with all its imperfections. Studies show huge expectations of citizens toward Europe. People open their hearts and minds and let Europe in. They see how many solutions to their worries and to their hopes can only come with joint European responses.

I think that Europe has become in 2020-21 a vehicle that is more indispensable than ever for this journey toward a better future.

That is why now is the good time for the Conference on the Future of Europe.

Indeed, it is a good news that finally the inexplicable delay to launch the Conference has come to its end and next week on Wednesday at 13:00 during the Plenary session of the European Parliament the three leaders of the European Institutions: Parliament, Commission and Council will sign the Joint Declaration. This largely ceremonial event will allow us to have the opening of the Conference on the 9th of May in Strasbourg.

Thank you for inviting me to this event. We meet to talk about the Conference in a moment which already has its place in the history of the European Union. The health crisis and its socio-economic consequences constitute an unprecedented challenge for the EU, its citizens and its Member States. They require decisive and wide-ranging actions. The EU has vision for its recovery, has a program and financial instruments needed to tackle these challenges, to re-establish the confidence of its citizens and also the credibility on the world stage. However, we also experience moments when internal disagreements and lack of coordination among the Member States lead to a slow capacity of action which is harshly criticised and politically punished by the citizens.

Unfortunately, the Conference on the Future of Europe is a resounding example of this horse-trading that has blocked a much awaited event for more than a year.

One year after the adoption of the European Parliament's resolution reflecting its position on the Conference, the remaining issue at stake, i.e. the governance of the Conference, seems to have been solved. The EP elections are fast approaching and we promised to our citizens that the Conference will bring reforms ahead of the 2024 European elections.

The Joint Declaration of the three institutions is a good news in my view. It brings commitments to:

- listen to the citizens and to follow up on the recommendations made by the Conference, by organising events in partnership with civil society and stakeholders at European, national, regional and local level, with national and regional Parliaments, the CoR and the EESC, social partners and academia and by organising European citizen's panels.
- specific events to be dedicated to young people.
- a multilingual digital platform for citizens to share their ideas and send online submissions.
- a feedback mechanism that will ensure that the ideas presented during the Conference will take the form of concrete recommendations for EU action

- the three institutions as equal partners and a lean governance structure, gender balanced.
- a co-presidency of the institutional trio - European Parliament, Commission, Council of the EU, planned as well for all of the Conference's new governance, overriding the Parliament's wish to preside over the work.
- discussions to cover, among others, the Union's democratic foundations, and how to strengthen democratic processes governing the European Union.
- the final outcome of the Conference to be presented in a report to the Joint Presidency, and the three institutions will reflect on how to follow up effectively, each within their sphere of competences and in accordance with Treaties.
- the scope of the CoFe that would reflect the areas where the EU has the competence to act or where the EU action should be to the benefit of the EU citizens.

The Treaty of Lisbon was written in a different era. Today, to ensure a better future for all of us we need to involve citizens. Events in the USA reminded us of the fragility of democracy. The Conference will be a special occasion to involve citizens, also those who feel left out. The health crisis also shows us the need to cooperate and we must seize every opportunity to stimulate an inclusive dialogue.

Social media, webinars but also public opinion surveys clearly show citizens' attachment to a Europe that cares about its citizens and remains open to the world. But citizens are getting tired of waiting and we have to come with a proposal before the hope has turned into a mistrust.

Europe's inability to act can be captured by anti- European populists. That is why starting this Conference now is so important. It can be a ground-breaking opportunity to achieve a more democratic, legitimate and effective Union.

To conclude, I would like to highlight that the Conference on the Future of Europe represent a major initiative to relaunch the project of European integration and reform of the EU. It remains to be seen how bold and ambitious we can be in the decisions that we will take. We know that some of the ambitious objectives can be reached only through the Treaty change. As one of European citizens said to me in one of my many get together " the boat of history has just arrived on our shores and we cannot miss it". I wanted to share this with you.