

**Professor Danuta Hübner**

**“We need to be open to democracy in all its forms”**

**Round Table**

**“What Future for European democracy”**

**The Union of European Federalists (UEF), the Spinelli Group and the  
Universities of Magdeburg and Passau**

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When I think about the Conference on the future of Europe as an unprecedented public dialogue which comes now, when we are getting out of terrible trauma of pandemic, I see it as a chance for renewing our hope and feeling that we are together, Europe and Europeans. I see the Conference as an opportunity to get pragmatic solutions for the post pandemic life.

But I see it also as a chance to protect European democracy, its values, its rule of law, because most of us Europeans, citizens of European Community are fed up with the populists' politics of veto emanating from some countries, supported by anachronistic unanimity principle, with the lack of respect of European values.

It is true that Europe is a representative democracy. But we can see that relying exclusively on representative democracy has not filled the gaps in what we call democratic deficit. This deficit is the best seen at the nexus where people's expectations and the existing practices of democratic institutions meet.

Representative democracy needs to be and can be strengthened through the direct involvement of citizens, through stronger attachment of citizens to Europe. It can be strengthened by deliberative democracy, agora like democracy that we hope will take effect in the conference.

But there is also another form of democracy that is an outgrowth of spontaneous people's movements in defense of their rights, a kind of bottom up democracy like women's protests in the streets of Poland or climate strikes of the European youth.

Calls for action on issues like climate emergencies or human rights come from people practicing democracy on the street. All these dimensions of democracy can feed each other with ideas and institutional receptivity.

And of course, we must be vigilant when authoritarian practices are presented to us as also democracy, just illiberal one.

To nourish citizens' strong attachment to Europe we need to be open to democracy in all its forms. I hope that the Conference will bring a Renaissance of civic involvement on a pan European base.

The Conference will be for all those who want to participate in it. Each of us who cares should reach out to the Conference. Listening to each other will be only the first step. We should be bold in implementing shared results.

The Conference can strengthen the pro European pro democratic current in the public opinion. It is natural that we focus on potential outcome of the Conference. But I am convinced that there is a huge value added of the process itself.

The Conference gives us a chance that from member states we can for the first time hear voices different than those of governments and political parties - voices of citizens. So far largely unknown to other citizens of the Union. It is important in times when we often see a cynical retreat away from democracy, from Europe. Only citizens can say „enough” to such trends.

For young people the Conference is an opportunity to participate in their first debate on Europe, listen to other young people from different parts of Europe, look at Europe through other people's eyes.

Every generation has the right and duty to ask what Europe is for. To grasp Europe with their own minds, hearts and action. To discover that Europe is not happening by itself. That it is men and women made.

I also hope that Conference will be an opportunity for all of us to understand that we cannot take Europe for granted. We have to care about what we have created so far, nourish it, protect it, not let anti European populists destroy it.