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“Making Europe an ever closer Union”

The Federalist strategy in the Conference of the Future of Europe

**On the 80th anniversary
of the Ventotene Manifesto "Towards a federal Europe"**

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I would like to start with a quote from the Manifesto:
And it is about change:

„The moment has arrived in which we must know how to discard old burdens, how to be ready for the new world that is coming, that will be so different from what we have imagined.“

Today 80 years later, a call for change and an expectation of change can be heard and sensed across Europe. This does not come as surprise. Throughout its history European integration has been a process of a permanent change, Europe has been reshaping, reforming, surviving, redesigning itself.

Sometimes these have been small steps. Sometimes the change has been big and fundamental and required courage and imagination. The need for change has been often demanded by the reality around us. This time around the world has again accelerated. Changes have been coming through embracing new policy areas or through enlargements bringing new demands and opportunities.

New steps made Europe different but always faithful to its values which inspired the fathers at the beginning.

And I think that the idea of the Conference on the Future of Europe fulfills exactly that call of the Ventotene Manifesto toward making the world better and, perhaps, lighter of the historical or political burdens we carry.

Europeans of today, especially the young ones, do not care so much about the past. What they are interested in are concrete things related to their future. And it is good. Every generation has the right and duty to ask themselves, what we need Europe for.

Today it is about climate, about defending women's rights, getting proper health care, helping less fortunate in the world, having a chance for a good life for their children and for themselves.

In the March 2021 Eurobarometer respondents were asked to choose developments they wanted to see for the future of Europe: first choice was having comparable living standards - 35% supported it, for stronger solidarity among Member States we saw 30% support, 25% of Europeans prioritized the development of a common health policy and 22% comparable education standards. So, it is about closer union among us, citizens, about trust, cohesion, understanding and solidarity.

The words like „solidarity" and „trust" form a canopy of the post-pandemic Union. In that spirit, we should put serious effort in removing the roadblocks that could slow our movement toward a more common future.

This is a moment when the unanimity principle comes to my mind.

Politically, the time is ripe for its rejection. We know what happens when one or two member states do not respect the fundamental principles of the EU, and nobody can do anything about it, due to the power of the veto.

But observance of fundamental values and rule of law is not on the market to be traded for withdrawal of a veto. Values are cast in stone. They are foundation on which the Conference will develop.

The unanimity principle actually breaks the delicate threads of which the trust and solidarity in the EU are woven together as a seamless garment made from the material of common values that we all agree to uphold if we want the Union work for us.

In reaction to lack of political will and commitment to ever closer Union in some member states, differentiated integration paths are more and more often seen as a way to go forward.

Those who want to do more on the integration path should not be blocked by few who do not want to do more.

Integrating Europe has always meant embracing new policy areas and new member states. In line with the Schuman declaration we have been gradually enlarging the area of shared sovereignty.

More than seventy years later what we can see is indeed an impressive progress in making more together, in achieving peace and prosperity. Rapid advances toward common responses to unexpected existential threats, like the pandemic, open new spaces for a more consolidated Union.

Ever closer union gradually gains a citizen legitimacy.

Now it is more probable than a decade ago that European citizens will put it on the European agenda as their demand and ask for merging more broadly our sovereign powers. More than nine in ten Europeans - 92% - agree that citizens' voice should be considered for decisions relating to the future of Europe. Only 6% disagree with it. These numbers in themselves are a potent driver for making Europe „an ever closer Union". We should build on this sentiment.

We know that EU is not only a community of states. Lisbon Treaty has made it also the community of citizens.

Conference can become a first real test run of that Treaty provision – ever closer Europe.

Representative democracy can be strengthened through the direct involvement of citizens. The Conference should become a place for a sort of „enhanced cooperation" of European citizens. Who said that only member states can enhance European integration? Citizens can do it as well. Conference can become a natural place where the citizens will be the „masters of Europe's future".

And it should not be limited to the listening phase of the Citizens' Panels. We must find ways to get citizens on board for the second phase when we will be implementing the recommendations coming out from joint reflection, in particular when it comes to such challenges as climate or, indeed, democracy itself.

I would encourage all of us that we are humble in listening to each other and truly bold in implementing what we arrive at, in the spirit of participation.

It will also be a good practice if we as individuals participate in events in member states other than our own, so that it can be felt that the Conference on the Future of Europe, although deeply embedded in particular localities, is indeed a panEuropean process.

Real reforms of Europe will come when Europeans will be ready to accept them as something that touches our individual lives at a deepest level.