

Professor Danuta Hübner

„We need to create European space to tackle the challenges we face”

Exchange of views with Commissioner Dubravka Šuica, Vice-President of the European Commission for Democracy and Demography on the Conference on the Future of Europe and the role of the European Parliament

Meeting of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs

Brussels (online), 13 April 2021

Dear Commissioner,
Dear Dubravka,

I am happy that you have accepted our invitation for an exchange of views with our Committee on the Conference on the Future of Europe! It is good to see you, even if only in virtual format.

There are some good news regarding the Conference. It has now been officially kicked off, with the signing of the Joint Declaration by the three institutions in March and the first meetings of the Executive Board already having taken place. I can imagine the Board has to work hard and effectively to make the Conference a fact of life as soon as possible.

We do not start from scratch. The work has already been ongoing behind the scenes for several months now, however this has not been visible for many of us, members of the European Parliament. This is the reason why we have invited you here today, to learn more about the organisation of the Conference and the multilingual digital platform that will help us engage with the citizens. For more than a year AFCO has been strongly involved in the conversation about the Conference, preparing papers, ideas and reflecting on procedures for the engagement of Europeans in shaping the future of Europe.

We have heard a lot of very positive comments in the platform that seems to be a crucial tool for connecting all of us and facilitate sharing of ideas and recommendations which this conference is about.

We are awaiting the inaugural event on the 9 of May, the Day of Europe. And I hope that you would agree with me that through this interactive, multilingual platform, along with events and debates organised across the Union, the Conference will give a say to the citizens. The main aim of the platform, if I understand well, is to publish the input from all Conference-related events and to provide information on the different parts of the Conference and how they are connected. The platform shall also broadcast citizen's panels organised at EU level, receive online submissions

and ideas shared by citizens and make documentation available. So indeed, if it turns out to be a user- friendly tool, we will all benefit.

I salute the idea of a specialised feedback mechanism to aggregate and analyse key points raised, so that they can also be taken into account during the European Citizens' panels and Conference Plenaries. The platform will also provide information on the Conference's structure and work, as well as resources for event organisers including a catalogue of key events through which they will be able to promote their initiatives at local, regional, national, and European levels. Citizens will easily be able to look up events in which they wish to participate thanks to an events map.

But I also hope that the platform will contribute not only to creating European space to find pragmatic solutions to challenges we Europeans face and will face in decades to come, but that it will also allow us to build gradually European *demos*, defend democracy and European values.

I hope, you will agree with me that the Conference will build on previous citizens' engagement in debates on the future of Europe, hundreds of citizens dialogues, debates we had on new European narrative, consultations, citizens' conventions. There are many civic organizations, groups, individuals that can be accelerators of the process we are just starting.

We must reach out to them, we must not underestimate the readiness and preparedness of those powerful European agents out there that can help protect the integrity of Europe, keep the Conference discourse within the rational bounds and reduce the risk of cacophony in the final recommendation. Because there will anti-European populists well prepared to overtake the political discourse in Europe