

## New EU Constitution: Citizens demand fundamental EU reform

Dear everyone interested, dear journalists,

Last weekend, 200 randomly selected citizens decided on binding proposals for EU reform. The citizens emphasize that they want a democratic Europe that defends its values. They also call for work on a European constitution.

Representatives of all EU institutions will now have to deal with the 39 proposals of the Democracy and Values citizens panel within the framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe. They shall be part of the conclusions of the Conference so that concrete legislative projects can follow from them.

**Daniel Freund**, head of the Greens/EFA delegation at the Future Conference, comments:

*"The Conference on the Future of the EU is an invitation to our citizens to shape the future of our Union. The proposals from the citizens' panels must be implemented, otherwise we risk losing citizen's trust. The recommendations show that EU citizens want a stronger EU: more democracy, better enforcement of European values and more investment. It is the duty of European and national politicians to turn these recommendations into laws. Citizens provide Europe with a unique chance to remove blockades that have lasted too long. There must be no excuses for further restraint. If we want citizens to truly identify with the EU, we must deliver now."*

Highlights from the recommendations of the Citizens' Panel on Democracy, Values, Rule of Law, Security:

- Amending the general conditionality regulation for **financial sanctions in case of violations of the rule of law** in Member States also independent of a threat to the EU budget. Independent media to be better protected and financially supported.
- A right for EU citizens to **vote directly for European party lists with candidates from many member states** (transnational lists in an EU constituency in addition to the national/regional constituencies currently) with uniform European electoral conditions.
- **European public investment** to create good jobs and improve the quality of life across the EU. Large companies should be properly taxed, tax havens in the EU abolished.
- A **solution to the problem with unanimity in votes in the Council** of Ministers, if necessary also by amending the EU Treaties.
- A **European Constitution** that protects democracy and fundamental rights and is voted on by the citizens.

### WHAT HAPPENS NEXT with these recommendations

On Friday 17 December, representatives of the Citizen Panel will present their recommendations in the working groups of the Future Conference. The representatives of the EU institutions and national parliaments will give their first feedback. MEP Daniel Freund and the new Minister of State for Europe Anna Lührmann (Greens) are sitting in the working group on values. They will meet from 11-13 hrs.

The next plenary session of the Future Conference on 22 January 2022 will discuss the recommendations publicly for the first time. By February, three more citizens' panels will vote on their recommendations and also present them in plenary.

In March, the Conference on the Future of Europe will discuss a draft final declaration for the first time. The conference is expected to decide on its conclusions with an extension in May 2022. According to the Joint Declaration of the three EU institutions Parliament, Council and Commission, it needs the approval of each of the three EU institutions and the national parliamentarians.

## SELECTED RECOMMENDATIONS IN FULL TEXT

### EU financial sanctions for attacks on the rule of law also without link to the EU-budget

10. “We recommend that the **conditionality regulation** (2020/2092, adopted on 16 December 2020) **is amended so that it applies to all breaches of the rule of law rather than only to breaches affecting the EU budget**”. The conditionality regulation allows for the suspension of EU funds to Member States breaching the rule of law. However, under the current formulation it only applies to breaches that affect, or risk affecting, the EU budget. Furthermore, the current phrasing of the conditionality regulation is self-protective of the EU’s budget and of the EU’s institutions rather than the citizens of the Member States concerned. Therefore, we recommend changing the current text of the regulation so that it covers all violations of the rule of law.

### EU Media Freedom Act for media pluralism, against politicians owning and influencing media

12. “We recommend that the **EU enforces its competition rules in the media sector more strictly to ensure that media pluralism** is protected in all Member States. The EU should prevent large media monopolies and political appointment processes for media outlet boards. We also recommend that **the upcoming EU Media Freedom act entails rules on preventing politicians from owning media outlets or having a strong influence on their content**”.

We recommend this because enforcing EU competition rules fosters a pluralist media landscape where citizens have a choice. Since the Commission is currently developing a law (Media Freedom Act) for the integrity of the EU media market, this law should also reflect that media outlets should not be owned or influenced by politicians.

### European Lists for European Parliament elections (transnational lists in an EU-wide constituency)

16. “We recommend adopting an **election law for the European Parliament** that harmonizes electoral conditions (voting age, election date, requirements for electoral districts, candidates, political parties and their financing). **European citizens should have the right to vote for different European Union level parties that each consist of candidates from multiple Member States**. During a sufficient transition period, citizens could still vote for both national and transnational parties”.

We recommend this because the European Union needs to build a sense of unity, which could be achieved by a truly unified election of the European Parliament. This common election will hold accountable the Members of the European Parliament and to focus the election campaign on shared European topics.

### Solution to the problem of unanimity (vetos) in voting in the Council of ministers

20. “We recommend that the **voting systems in the EU institutions should be reassessed focusing on the issue of unanimous voting**. Voting 'weight' should be calculated fairly, so that small countries' interests are protected”.

Unanimous voting poses a significant challenge to decision making in the EU. The large number of member states makes it very difficult to reach agreement. If necessary, European treaties should change to address the issue of unanimity.

### More European Public Investment in harmonisation of quality of life across the EU

21. “We recommend **the EU to make public investments which lead to the creation of appropriate jobs and to the improvement and harmonisation of quality of life across the EU**, between Member States, and within Member States (i.e. at the regional level). There is a need to **ensure supervision, transparency and effective communication towards citizens in the implementation of public investments and to allow citizens to track the entire process of investment**. Investments into quality of life include education, health, housing, physical infrastructures, care for the elderly and people with disabilities, taking into account the needs of every Member State. Additional investments should strive to establish a good balance between appropriate work and personal life in order to allow a healthy lifestyle”.

We recommend this because harmonising the level of life across the EU will improve economic progress across the EU, which will lead towards a unified EU. This is a fundamental indicator towards further integration of the EU. Although some of these mechanisms are already in place, we feel there is still room for further improvement.

### **Effective taxation of big corporations and elimination of tax havens in the EU**

23. “We recommend **taxing big corporations and income from big corporations to contribute to public investments**, and to use the taxation to invest into education and development of each country (R&D, scholarships - Erasmus etc.). It is also important to **focus on eliminating the existence of tax havens in the EU**”.

We recommend this because it will help to prevent tax evasion and creation of tax havens and to help with compliance of legislation.

### **Financial and practical support for independent media to cover more EU politics**

31. “We recommend that the **EU provides more information and news to European citizens**. It should **use any means that are necessary while respecting freedom and independence of the media**. It should **provide media outlets with resources as well as a broad and reliable information** about EU activities and policies. The EU should guarantee that the information is broadcasted evenly across all Member States by National and European media and should ensure that Member States encourage public broadcasters and public news agencies to cover European affairs”.

We recommend this because based on our personal experience and based on the data from Eurobarometer, the majority of European citizens are informed through the traditional media (press, radio and television) and the information currently offered in these channels about the EU is very scarce. The media, particularly the public, have a public service function, so reporting on EU issues that affect the European population is essential and indispensable to fulfill that function. We recommend that the information issued in the different Member States about the EU be the same in order to promote integration and avoid different information on different issues in each country. Using the already existing media channels is more feasible, and less expensive than creating a new channel and achieves the same outcome. The pre-existing channels also have the advantage that they are already known by citizens. No citizen should need to choose between different channels to be able to access different (national or european) content.

### **A European constitution protecting human rights and democracy voted by citizens**

35. “We recommend that the **EU reopens the discussion about the constitution of Europe with a view to creating a constitution informed by the citizens of the EU**. Citizens should be able to vote in the creation of such a constitution. This constitution in order to avoid conflict with the member states should **prioritize the inclusion of human rights and democracy values**. The

creation of such a constitution should consider previous efforts that never materialized to a constitution”.

Because this constitution would engage young people with politics at the EU level and counteract increasing forces of nationalism. Because it would provide a common definition of what is meant by democracy in Europe, and make sure that this is implemented in an equal way amongst all member states. Because the EU has shared values regarding democracy and human rights. Because this would enable citizens to be included in the decision making process, and allow citizens to identify more as being from the EU - having participated in the process.

Daniel Freund - Mitglied des Europäischen Parlaments

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