

Signing Ceremony of the Joint Declaration on the Conference on the Future of Europe

Brussels, 10 March 2021

Mr President,
Madam President,
Honourable Members,

When, throughout Europe, we are facing a pandemic that has caused the biggest economic and social crisis since the Second World War; when our hospitals and healthcare professionals are battling tirelessly to save lives; when vaccination is a race against time; when millions of workers are losing their jobs and thousands of businesses are facing the risk of bankruptcy; when the present is marked by uncertainty, anxiety and fear, by convening this Conference on the Future of Europe we are sending Europeans a message of confidence and hope in the future.

Confidence that we will beat the pandemic and overcome the crisis, and hope that, together, we will build a fair, green and digital Europe with a future.

We welcome the fact that it has been possible to overcome the deadlock that had paralysed us. I am grateful to everyone here in the European Parliament, in the Commission and in the Council who worked hard to reach this agreement.

We know that we do not all share the same view on the Europe of the future or the future of Europe. But this is exactly why the Conference on the Future of Europe represents a decisive moment, as it allows us to debate our differing views frankly and without taboos. This is the only way we can overcome divisions and strengthen what unites us, as we have always done throughout the last almost 64 years.

And the time for this discussion is now, because we must start preparing right away, so that when we have beaten the pandemic, we are ready to build the future, without a second to waste.

The Union needs the power of its citizens behind it to make it stronger. Therefore, we cannot have a conference of institutions discussing institutions. It must be a conference of European citizens discussing what they want and how they want to build the Europe of the future. A conference about the political issues that really matter to Europeans.

The Eurobarometer – in addition to reflecting changing circumstances – gives us a very clear picture of the issues that are continually of most concern to our fellow citizens and that require a response from us: economic issues and unemployment in particular; climate change, migration and terrorism.

We have a strategic agenda for the future that brings the European institutions together around a common goal: building a Europe that better protects citizens and freedoms; a fair, green and social Europe underpinned by a dynamic economy; a Europe that is able to promote European interests and values on the global stage.

But we need Europeans to embrace and take ownership of this goal, because, ultimately, it is intended for them.

This is why this Conference is so important. Because it will allow us to bring Europeans into the public space. It is vital for European citizens to have a space where they can discuss their concerns and their expectations with their representatives. So that public policies can provide concrete answers to the day-to-day needs of citizens, so that no citizen feels left behind.

Time is running out. It is time to deliver. It is time to start building our future together.