Having endured a series of crises over the past decade, the European Union is ready to make sweeping changes in line with the green and digital transformations. But citizens must play a key role in designing the blueprint for the future, writes Renew Europe leader Dacian Cioloş.

As leader of the Renew Europe group in the European Parliament, what do you see as your group’s main priorities for the next couple of years?

Our Union is at a crossroads. Brexit has shown that EU membership is reversible, and the political forces of populism and nationalism are far from defeated.

We need to learn the lessons from Brexit and move Europe forward so that it is more capable, not
only to deliver peace, prosperity and security for all of its citizens, but also to make sure our continent is at the forefront of the great transformations of our time.

We want Europe to be firm on the rule of law and in protecting and developing individual rights, not least in the field of Artificial Intelligence and new technologies. Access to data will be critical in this endeavour and we need to define the European way of doing it.

At the same time, we have to define a path for growth that delivers both prosperity and climate neutrality - good jobs in a healthy environment. Some sectors of the economy will have to reinvent themselves, such as energy, mobility and agriculture.

Research and innovation and investments in a just transition will be decisive in achieving our ambition of a climate-neutral Europe. The Green Deal is not only a challenge, it’s also about opportunity.

**This year another conference on the Future of Europe will take place. What are the most important issues the conference needs to address and how do you ensure its outcomes are relevant to EU citizens?**

This is not just another conference. It is a much-needed platform to discuss how we can do Europe better.

My political family has been waiting for many years to launch this initiative, which must be widely opened to citizens.

I am glad that the conference is now on the right track. Debates on the future of Europe should not be ‘Brussels bubble-centric’ or the prerogative of the elite; on the contrary.

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The 2010s were marked by a series of crises for the European Union. This Conference is a chance to listen, to reflect, to identify shortcomings in the Union’s policies and institutions and establish ways to reform. And, of course, to deliver change. We have two and a half years to do so.
What impact will the loss of your 17 UK MEPs have on the structure and strength of Renew Europe and more generally what are your thoughts on the loss of UK policymakers from the European Parliament and the other EU institutions?

For me, there is no doubt: Brexit is a terrible, terrible mistake. But as Europeans, it was not, and is not, our choice; it is the result of a democratic process that we have to accept.

And we all have to move forward. Now, the European Union must defend its interests in the negotiations ahead of us.

The UK is not geographically moving further away from Europe; it is only a political distance. Therefore, I do hope for the closest possible future relationship.

Whatever the outcome will be, I am confident Britain will remain a close ally and a strategic partner.

At a political level, Renew Europe will ensure that the bonds between us and the Liberal Democrats remain very strong. I have been deeply impressed by their work ethic and determination from day one.

They have helped to create one of the largest pro-European movements and I have no doubt that, one day, a young British leader will once again bring Britain back to the heart of the European family, where it belongs.

For Renew Europe, in the short term, Brexit will also be accompanied by new MEPs joining after January 31. We will remain a central force in the post-Brexit Parliament, determined to use our strength to transform Europe and deliver reforms.

What hopes do you have for the Ursula Von der Leyen Commission? Where should its priorities lie?

Renew Europe has played an important role in shaping the priorities and composition of the new College and it is for this reason that we also supported it.

However, as I said at the time of the election of the Commission, our support is not a blank cheque.

Each Commissioner has a key role to play in restoring Europeans’ trust in the EU, with a vision, ambition and passion for Europe. From East to West, from North to South, all of us here have a clear mission, that of reinvigorating the European project.

We will not achieve this with declarations or fancy promises, but with facts and measures that make Europe concrete, understandable and useful in the daily lives of our citizens.

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The Green Deal and the Digital Agenda are two priorities where the EU must not only set targets and ambitions but also a political and policy path to make them a reality.

As a former European commissioner, what advice, if any, have you given to the six Renew Europe commissioners?
I am not at that stage in life where I feel entitled to give advice and talk from experience. We have a team of dynamic and very experienced Commissioners.

They know that the Parliament will be an ally to find the best European solutions to European challenges and they also know that Europe is not Brussels.

For me, it is absolutely key to reconnect the European project to people in our Member States and regions. This is not advice, but an objective.

The Conference on the Future of Europe will certainly play a role and each one of us in the Parliament as well as every Commissioner will have a responsibility to connect our political and policy priorities to our European roots, discussing and exchanging with citizens.

**As an agricultural expert, what are your thoughts on the farm to fork strategy, and what should Janusz Wojciechowski’s priorities be as the new agricultural commissioner?**

I welcome the ambition of the new Commission to put forward a new comprehensive strategy for our food and our agriculture. New priorities and traditional policies should not be opposed.

On the contrary, traditional policies like the Common Agricultural Policy should be revisited, so that they match today’s challenges.

There is a broad consensus, both within the farming community and society as a whole, for a serious reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, not just an administrative facelift.

We want to strengthen the ‘common’ part of the Common Agricultural Policy and to deliver a policy that helps farmers to invest and transform their farms, so that they are more sustainable and more economically viable.

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The Farm to Fork Strategy needs to build on the capacity of the CAP to provide a new impetus to our farming sector.

**What, in your opinion, are the biggest challenges currently facing the EU and what can Parliament do to address them?**

Climate change is an existential challenge and biodiversity loss is reaching catastrophic levels.

As citizens, we all have a duty to take our responsibilities and make changes to our lifestyles. As politicians working for citizens, we have the responsibility to do much more than that.

To me it is clear that European countries are stronger if they confront this challenge together. At the same time, within the EU, regions are not equally developed; some have to work harder than others.

This is why we need a just transition and we must look carefully at the impact that our policy
proposals have on people’s lives, jobs and businesses.

Some parts of the economy will have to reinvent themselves and we have to ensure that no one is left behind.

**Following the disappointing outcome of COP25, what does the EU need to do ahead of next year’s COP26 in Glasgow?**

I believe that with the right preparation and a common vision, the European Union can once again take a global lead in the run-up to COP26.

Renew Europe will be a strong partner for international action on climate change. I think the dramatic fires in Australia should be a wake-up call for many leaders in the world.

Climate change is not something for the future. It’s happening now.

**At a time when the rule of law and democracy is under threat in certain parts of Europe, including Romania, how would you like to see the EU put pressure on the governments of these countries to change, and can the upcoming MFF negotiations be used as a tool of influence?**

I am confident that with the current Government, the rule of law is no longer under threat. The Romanian Alliance 2020 USR PLUS, our delegation in Renew Europe, remains vigilant and I assure you that if there are any worrying signs, we will be the first to voice our concern and take action.

More importantly - and I have seen this major shift in Romanian society in the past few years - tens of thousands of Romanians will take to the streets to defend the rule of law, as it was when the previous PSD government was trying to bend the law.

The Rule of Law is a priority for Renew Europe and we were key in making this one of the Commission’s priorities. We need to develop an EU mechanism on democracy, rule of law and fundamental rights, as proposed by Parliament in the last mandate.

Too many EU leaders are challenging the values of the Union and this has to change. This is also why we have pressed for reforms so that EU funds are more closely linked to the rule of law under the MFF.

We say to those governments that refuse to abide by the rules: If your citizens cannot enjoy fundamental rights then you cannot benefit from EU subsidies. We are determined to defend liberal democracy.

This must also come hand-in-hand with a recognition that for some countries, the benefits of the European project need to be communicated more clearly and in a more accessible manner.

This is why I want to find a permanent way to include Europeans in the EU decision-making process. Our citizens should feel part of a common project and a common dream, not part of a system that imposes a doctrine on them from above.
Dods events


Partnership events

The Health and Care Innovation Expo Civil Service Live Civil Service Awards Chief Nursing Officer for England's Summit Women into Leadership The Youth Justice Convention Socitm Spring Conference NHSCC Annual Members' Event Dods at Party Conference