

## **Brussels-centric approach to Future of Europe Conference will not engage citizens, says new CoR President**

Written by Martin Banks on 20 February 2020 in News  
News

The newly-elected President of the Committee of the Regions says a “centralised”, Brussels-led approach to the Future of Europe Conference will not succeed in rebuilding citizens' trust in EU policymaking.



*Photo credit: Press Association*

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Apostolos Tzitzikostas gave the warning to EU decision-makers in a debate about democracy with EU Commissioner Dubravka Šuica, who is responsible for democracy and demography.

The conference, which comes following the UK's departure from the EU, is due to start in May and is expected to last up to two years.

Tzitzikostas, said, "If the three main institutions are serious about turning the Conference from an institutional debate into a tool to put 'citizens first', they need to take on board local and regional elected politicians."

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"We stand ready to contribute to the Conference and bring Europe back home to its people," he added.

Warnings about an overly "top-down" approach to the Future of Europe Conference have been growing ever since detailed plans were announced by the European Commission in December 2019.

It has been billed as an opportunity to reconnect the European project with citizens and allay fears about the future of the EU after Brexit.

But the idea has been criticised by civil society leaders as well as by experts and outside observers for what some call its 'Brussels-centric approach.'

"If the three main institutions are serious about turning the Conference from an institutional debate into a tool to put 'citizens first', they need to take on board local and regional elected politicians" **Apostolos Tzitzikostas**

Fresh concerns have been voiced in an open letter to the leaders of the main EU institutions - the Commission, Council and European Parliament - by a Europe-wide network of academics.

The letter is authored by Italy-based Alberto Alemanno, internationally known for work on the democratisation of the EU; Kalypto Nicolaïdis, a Greek/French academic and Professor of International Relations and Director of the Centre for International Studies at Oxford University; Nicolò Milanese, founding director of European Alternatives, a civil society organisation, and Ulrike Guerot who is a Berlin-based Founder and Director of the European Democracy Lab.

It reads, "There is a tangible risk that by raising expectations it cannot easily deliver on, the Conference may erode citizens' trust at a time when the demand for public engagement is at record highs across the continent."

In a recent parliamentary debate on the conference, Dacian Cioloş, head of Renew Europe, said the conference "is an opportunity to open up the door of Europe to citizens," because the EU, he added, "was not created for elites."

The rapid growth of euroscepticism in the past few years suggests that citizens in many countries have a different perception of what the EU's future should be, he notes, adding, "We should involve more citizens and not just once every five years for the elections."

Parliament was the first EU institution to set out its ideas for the Conference and has adopted a resolution which "commits itself to a genuine follow-up of the Conference without delay, with legislative proposals, initiating treaty change or otherwise," and "calls on the other two institutions to make the same commitment."

Commenting further, former UK Labour parliamentarian Roger Casale said, "This kind of inclusive bottom-up collaboration between civil society, local authorities, national representatives and MEPs is exactly what is needed for a productive conversation about the future of Europe. It will give all who take part the opportunity to engage and energise a new conversation about Europe's future."

"The future of Europe as a community of values is a much wider debate than just about the future of the EU."

### **About the author**

Martin Banks is a senior reporter at The Parliament Magazine

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