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Conference on the Future of Europe: What worked, what now, what next?

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The grand rhetoric surrounding the Conference on the Future of Europe when it was launched in 2021 did little to overcome political realities. Critics claim that process-related problems and a lack of visibility have left the Conference in the doldrums. Yet, there is still time for political interest to match the enthusiasm of the citizens actively engaged in the Conference and for this initiative to end with tangible results.



That is the conclusion of this Conference Observatory report, which is based on exchanges held by the Conference Observatory High-Level Advisory Group, co-chaired by Brigid Laffan and Herman Van Rompuy. The report argues that the final CoFoE phases must - and can - tackle the important concerns building up in terms of the buy-in, organisation and legitimacy of the Conference and that the entire experiment with

participatory democracy can add value to the ongoing efforts of reforming EU democracy. To that end, it provides lessons for the future from the process so far, suggests actionable results in the remaining phases, and proposes new forms of citizens' participation in EU politics that build on past experience.

Based on a detailed analysis of what worked and what didn't until now, there are five must-do's for the next phase of the Conference:

- 1) raise the stakes of the Conference;
- 2) give citizens new opportunities before the end of the CoFoE process to have an exchange with their political representatives about their recommendations;
- 3) boost transparency;
- 4) translate citizens' recommendations into actionable proposals;
- 5) specify the final path to and form of the CoFoE's outcome.

Finally, the report puts forward four options on how to incorporate new participatory elements in the EU's democratic process after the Conference ends:

- 1) European citizens' deliberations on key legislative proposals
- 2) Multilevel citizens' deliberations on major transformative topics
- 3) 'Big tent' fora on the EU's strategic priorities
- 4) European citizens' deliberations in conjunction with a European Convention.

These ideas are non-exhaustive and can be combined to offer both top-down and bottom-up approaches to strengthening, deepening and rejuvenating EU democracy.

The Conference Observatory is a joint initiative by an international consortium comprising the Bertelsmann Stiftung, the European Policy Centre, the King Baudouin Foundation and Stiftung Mercator. It aims to observe, critically analyse and inspire deliberations on the Conference on the Future of Europe. As part of the Observatory, the High-Level Advisory Group accompanies and seeks to shape the Conference process and outcomes.

