



THE CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE AS A PROCESS OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

The Conference on the Future of Europe begins. A project that aims to strengthen the European Union through citizen participation in challenges such as a climate emergency, digital transformation or the crisis of the rule of law.

Every May 9, European citizens celebrate Europe Day. On May 9, 1950, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs and one of the founding fathers of the European Union (EU), Robert Schuman, issued a historic Declaration with which he managed to lay the first stone for the construction of the Europe that today we know. In it, Schuman expressed the idea of forming a new political cooperation between European nations in order to avoid a possible warlike conflict in Europe and maintain peace.

Schuman pointed out in the Declaration that "Europe will not be made at once or in a joint effort: it will be made thanks to concrete achievements, which first of all create a de facto solidarity." That is why, in times of crisis, uncertainty or Euroscepticism, we must remember how important the creation of such an organization was and how necessary it is to get involved to prevent its deterioration. Today it is Ursula Von der Leyen, the President of the Commission, who

remembers Schuman's words and points out that "only together can we build the Union of tomorrow".

Also, it is essential to emphasize the origins of Europe Day because this year it acquires a special dimension with respect to the construction of the future of Europe for two reasons:

- 1) The first of them is the exceptional situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. It has been a turning point on what we understand by being part of a common project between states, being able to feel the need for collaboration and solidarity between countries in order to give a unanimous response to the virus and make Europe a safe space in which to travel.
- 2) On the other hand, this May 9, 2021 is special for the launch of the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE), a space for dialogue and debate that will allow citizens from all corners of the



continent to give to know their ideas to help shape the future of Europe.

The Conference stands as a space for citizen participation launched by the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission, where Europeans will be able to interact, organize events and debate the proposals made to improve the future of the Union through of a multilingual digital platform that will last until 2022. But, in addition, it also responds to a social need of European citizens so that their voice is

heard by the European institutions. This need for dialogue and listening is clearly reflected in the latest Eurobarometer where 92% of those surveyed demand that the voice of citizens be taken into account in decisions concerning the future of Europe. Furthermore, 75% of Europeans consider the Conference to represent significant progress for democracy in the EU.

This interest and social involvement arise as a reflection on the COVID-19 crisis and its effects. 6 out of 10 European citizens admit that the





pandemic has been the factor that has made them reflect on the course that the EU should follow. In addition, 47% of Europeans say that young people must play an important role in decision-making, as well as national governments, university professors, experts, intellectuals and scientists. Ultimately, more than half of Europeans would like to participate in the Conference. That is why the Conference comes at a time when citizens seem to want to be involved in the future of Europe, and the Conference will be the tool that will make it possible.

Fortunately, the Conference is not articulated as the only process of citizen participation, but rather follows the guidelines of the United Nations. The UN at the summit on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), pointed out the need for States to agree to promote local action, speed up the implementation of the SDGs and favor the empowerment and support of cities, authorities and local communities. The United Nations requires States to ensure the widest possible public participation in the decision-making process on development so that all interested people have a voice and vote in what affects them.

The UN points out that one of the main requirements that any citizen participation process must contain is the inclusion of all those voices that have historically been invisible. Women, ethnic, racial and religious minorities, internally displaced people, migrants, people with disabilities and people living in poverty, among others, must be present in the participation processes to put the problems of these groups on the table. If we ignore the problems of these groups and do not combat the inequality, exclusion and institutionalized discrimination they suffer, there will never be a real sustainable, universal and inclusive development. That is why, in order to achieve long-term results,

any process of citizen participation, according to the UN recommendations to Member States, must involve as many social agents as possible in order to project a holistic vision of the problems to treat. Therefore, it is necessary that citizen participation processes were accessible to all citizens.

The European Union is made up of 27 Member States, all of which are part of the United Nations. For this reason, the 27 Member States must demand that the EU, as a participatory process, is inclusive of these groups. The digitization of the process facilitates greater access to citizens, although we must not forget and as has been seen during the months of the pandemic, that not all citizens have equitable access to the Internet, especially the most vulnerable groups. For this reason, the European Union and any organization that decides to develop a process of citizen participation, such as the Conference on the Future of Europe, should not leave the decision to participate or not in the process exclusively in the hands of the citizens, but must provide tools that allow greater access to it, as well as a speech that reflects the importance of their participation in our societies in the future.

In short, the Conference on the future of Europe is an ambitious experiment with the clear objective of involving citizens in the future of Europe in matters such as climate emergency, digital transformation or the crisis of the rule of law. Depending on its success, it can be articulated as an example of good practice in which other national or international organizations can be reflected, just as the EU can also take other organizations or local governments as an example of good practice.

As António Guterres, Secretary General of the United Nations, pointed out, in an event on human rights and participation held within the framework



MAY 2021

of the 75th session of the UN General Assembly, “the key to revitalizing and reinventing governance lies in truly participating meaning of people and civil society in the decisions that affect their lives”. Given the words of the Secretary General, as citizens, we must focus our efforts on demand the existence of a greater number of spaces in which

our voice is taken into account and facilitating and demanding that access to these spaces be facilitated to those most vulnerable groups. and invisible.

Helena Ripollés Rodríguez,
ANUE team



Published by:



**Asociación para las
Naciones Unidas
en España**

United Nations Association of Spain

Supported by:



**Generalitat
de Catalunya**

The ANUE magazine does not necessarily endorse the opinions expressed by its collaborators.

Sources:

Acerca de la UE. *Declaración de Robert Schuman, 9 de mayo de 1950*. Web oficial de la Unión Europea. https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/symbols/europe-day/schuman-declaration_es

La agenda para el Desarrollo sostenible. *17 Objetivos para las personas y para el planeta*. Web oficial de las Naciones Unidas. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/es/development-agenda/>

Noticias ONU (2020, 25 septiembre). *Guterres y Bachelet llaman a los gobiernos a escuchar las demandas de cambio de sus ciudadanos*. Web oficial de las Naciones Unidas. <https://news.un.org/es/story/2020/09/1481242>

Pérez de las Heras, Beatriz (2020, 6 octubre) *La participación ciudadana en el futuro de Europa: instrumentos y oportunidades para promover un espacio público europeo*. Universidad de Deusto. <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=7695851>

Special Eurobarometer 500 Report (octubre-noviembre 2020), *Future of Europe*. European Parliament and European Commission. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/files/be-heard/eurobarometer/2021/future-of-europe-2021/en-foe-special-eb-report.pdf>

Un nuevo impulso a la democracia europea. *Conferencia sobre el futuro de Europa*. Web oficial de la Unión Europea. https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/new-push-european-democracy/conference-future-europe_es

Zona de prensa (2021, 10 marzo) *Conferencia sobre el Futuro de Europa Dialogar con los ciudadanos para construir una Europa más resiliente*. Web oficial de la Unión Europea. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/es/ip_21_1065