



Conference
on the **Future**
of Europe

renew
europe.



USR PLUS Manifesto on the Future of Europe



USR PLUS's vision for the Europe of tomorrow

Dacian Cioloș

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The Conference on the Future of Europe represents the first chance for Romania and notably for Romanian citizens to **directly contribute to the way the European Union's future directions are shaped.**

The European Union was created as a project of prosperity, peace and solidarity of Western countries. The European project grew primarily from the needs of the West. Due to the isolation behind the Iron Curtain, Romania and the other countries in the central and eastern part of the continent could join this project only decades later, and so far have not had the opportunity to voice their opinions directly on the major directions for the future.

Established at the initiative of our political family, Renew Europe, the Conference will focus on the citizens and their needs, which will in practice translate into thousands of debates over the next two years, at several levels and on various topics that will lead to a set of conclusions that will then be put into practice. Every Romanian citizen will have a real chance to make their voice heard. Either through the digital platform provided by the Conference, or by organizing or participating in events that contribute constructively to the debate on the future of Europe.

We believe that the European Union is the most successful political project of the last century, but we are also aware that the European project is not perfect hence our full commitment to revitalise it.

We believe in a renewed and strong Europe, in a Europe of all its citizens, in a Europe of prosperity and equity, in a Europe of democracy, freedom and the rule of law. A European Union of all its citizens. A Europe of innovation, globally competitive. A Europe that protects its citizens

This manifesto is the starting point for our involvement in the Conference on the Future of Europe. Structured in several thematic chapters, the Manifesto addresses current issues, the solutions we propose for these issues and how the lives of European citizens would change if our proposals became a reality.

On the 26th of May, 2019, we asked your vote to be able to represent Romanian citizens at the European level. Today we ask for more than one vote, we ask for your involvement. We are looking forward to hearing your opinion on any aspect that can improve the Union and Romania's place in the EU.

Along with this manifesto, we are launching a period of consultations, a period in which we want to hear your voice. Therefore, the conclusions of this document, which we will support during the Conference, are on the table and will be established by us together.



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1

Institutions, democratization, citizen participation

Alin Mituța

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Although it has been progressively simplified through consecutive treaty changes, the EU's institutional architecture remains very complex and difficult to understand for the average citizen. The Conference on the Future of Europe is an opportunity to discuss the European institutions, their coherence and decision-making processes, as well as their share of competences at the European, national or local level.

Citizen participation

What doesn't work well?

One of the reasons why citizens often feel disconnected from the European Union is **the lack of an European public space**. The current framework in which the leaders of the European institutions are elected, a tangled and cumbersome decision-making process and especially how citizens can (or rather cannot) contribute to this decision-making process are obstacles to creating a real space for ideas, in order to attract the attention and interest of citizens.

At the moment, citizens are rarely involved in decision-making at the European level. For the vast majority of citizens, it only happens once every 5 years, when they elect representatives to the European Parliament. Between elections, there is the possibility of using the European citizens' initiative. However, the tool is difficult to use and has not shown that it can have a concrete finality. Contributions to the public consultations launched by the Commission

on legislative proposals in preparation are another method of involvement, but the decision-making impact of such contributions is not easy to quantify. Ultimately, **citizens' participation in decision-making at the European level is not sufficiently stimulated and facilitated**.

What are the solutions we propose?

The Joint Declaration on the Conference on the Future of Europe argues that European citizens must gain new opportunities to express themselves on the European stage. Indeed, to create a genuine European public space, we need to think of ways for European citizens to be directly involved in the political life of the Union as often as possible, not just every 5 years, when they vote. We, therefore, propose the creation of a mechanism for structured consultation of European citizens, in order to integrate their views into the European Union's annual priorities program. The annual European Assembly would aim to stimulate and facilitate citizens' participation in EU decision-making as well as to build a European public space (see details below).

European democracy

What doesn't work well?

Representatives sent by citizens to the European Parliament do not have equal decision-making power

with the EU Council on some very important issues, such as external relations, enlargement, taxation or social security and protection measures. Although the Treaty of Lisbon largely enshrines decision-making equality between the European Parliament and the EU Council, many areas remain in which the Council takes precedence, without Parliament having an active role. **This represents a democratic deficit**, as the decision-making power is unbalanced in favour of the representatives of Member States, a result of the founding philosophy of the EU, as a union of the Member States, not necessarily a union of the citizens.

The democratic deficit is also visible in the process of electing the President of the European Commission. This process should, according to the logic of representative democracy, be based on the vote of the citizens in the European elections, but, as we have seen in the last elections, it has mostly been decided in negotiations behind closed doors. This situation causes general confusion and decreases citizens' confidence and interest in the European elections. Moreover, there are very important bodies at the European Union level, such as the Eurogroup, which operate according to their own rules, not being fully integrated into the Community institutional framework. These bodies often reflect a differentiated integration at the EU level.

The way European elections are organized must be reformed. At the moment, the European elections take place within different national systems and are controlled by national parties. Most often, in this process the citizens are being called to the polls through messages focused on national political disputes, rather than European solidarity. This way of holding elections takes away the chance of debating EU-wide topics and of connecting citizens to a European public space, which gives the electorate the feeling of alienation from the institutions in Brussels.

What are the solutions we propose?

The voice of European citizens should be heard not only more often, but also more strongly. The European elections must be a defining moment in the life of the Union, and the vote of the citizens must be the basis for electing the European Union's leaders. The President of the European Commission must be appointed based on the election results, reflecting the proposal of a majority formed in Parliament. Candidates for the post of President of the European Executive could run on transnational lists to obtain a mandate from all citizens. The introduction of transnational lists would also reform the electoral process, reducing the influence of national disputes in the election campaign and connecting citizens to European debates.

The transnational lists should reflect the European geographical balance and the Members elected on these lists should be added to those elected according to national seat distributions, without affecting the current distribution of seats.

In addition, it is necessary for the European Parliament, directly elected by European citizens, to obtain **equal decision-making power with the Council** over all European policy areas in order to strike a balance between the decision-making power of citizens' representatives and the decision-making power of Member States. Moreover, like any national Parliament, **the European Parliament should acquire the power of legislative initiative**, as at this time, only the European Commission has this prerogative.

The European Parliament must also have the authority to carry out one of its most important parliamentary tasks, namely the capacity for democratic scrutiny of the European institutions, including for the euro area. The European currency is currently governed by the

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Eurogroup, an informal body that acts according to its own rules. We do not want a separate parliament for the euro area - the European Parliament must be the institution that, by virtue of the democratic mandate received from European citizens, also has decision-making power over the euro. Moneda europeană este guvernată în acest moment la nivelul Eurogrupului, un organism informal care acționează după propriile reguli. Nu ne dorim un parlament separat pentru zona euro, ci Parlamentul European trebuie să fie instituția care, în virtutea mandatului democratic primit de la cetățenii europeni, să aibă putere de decizie și asupra euro.

Institutional efficiency

What doesn't work well?

In sensitive areas such as taxation, external relations, enlargement, the headquarters of the European institutions, etc. unanimity is needed in the Council, which may allow for the blocking of important decisions. It is thus necessary to consider whether the decision by a qualified majority should be introduced in some of these areas.

Moreover, the current institutional framework is confusing for both European citizens and the European Union's external partners. Who is actually the leader of the European Union? The President of the European Executive, the President of the European Council, the President of the European Parliament or the Council of the EU? Who should Washington call if it wants to talk to Europe? This situation also creates problems in terms of institutional efficiency.

What are the solutions we propose?

The Conference on the Future of Europe is an opportunity to **discuss the effectiveness of the European institutions.**

The EU Council is often stuck in making a quick decision, usually by the unanimity rule. We, therefore, need to consider whether in certain areas where we need an EU rapid response capability, **the unanimity rule in the Council could be replaced by that of the qualified majority.**

What is qualified majority voting?

Decisions in the EU Council can be taken with the vote of **55%** of the Member States (15 out of 27) representing at least **65%** of the citizens of the European Union.

Eficiența instituțiilor ține și de o funcționare simplificată. În acest sens, o opțiune potrivită este aceea de a **unifica Președinția Comisiei Europene cu Președinția Consiliului European**. În acest moment, Președintele Comisiei participă la sesiunile Consiliului European, dar acestea sunt conduse de Președintele Consiliului European care are un rol de mediator între opiniile, uneori divergente, din Consiliu. Considerăm că această funcție poate fi asumată de Președintele Comisiei, care ar avea astfel un rol mai întărit în relație cu liderii statelor membre. O astfel de măsură ar eficientiza și simplifica funcționarea instituțiilor europene.

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What will change for you?

For a European citizen, a real European public space would mean that he would be able to constantly participate in setting EU priorities. For example, every year, between January and April, in each Member State, national assemblies will happen, in which citizens, civil society representatives and academia will be involved, together

with representatives of Parliament and the Government. These national assemblies will put forward priorities that should be included in an Annual European Program that will be presented to the European Commission, after it was debated in an **European Assembly**.

Citizens involved in the EU's decisions

January - April

National Assemblies.

Citizens debate and propose priorities for the EU in the next year. Citizens, civil society, academia, parliamentarians and representatives of the Government will participate.

9th of May

European Assembly.

The assembly devises a EU Annual Programme proposal that is sent to the European Commission. Citizens can also propose European Citizens Initiatives on this occasion.

May - September

Debates in the institutions.

The proposal of the European Assembly feeds into the debate in the European Institutions regarding the priorities for the next year.

September

State of the Union .

The President of the European Commission, in his or her speech regarding the State of the Union, presents the EU Program for the next year, taking into account the proposal of the European Assembly.

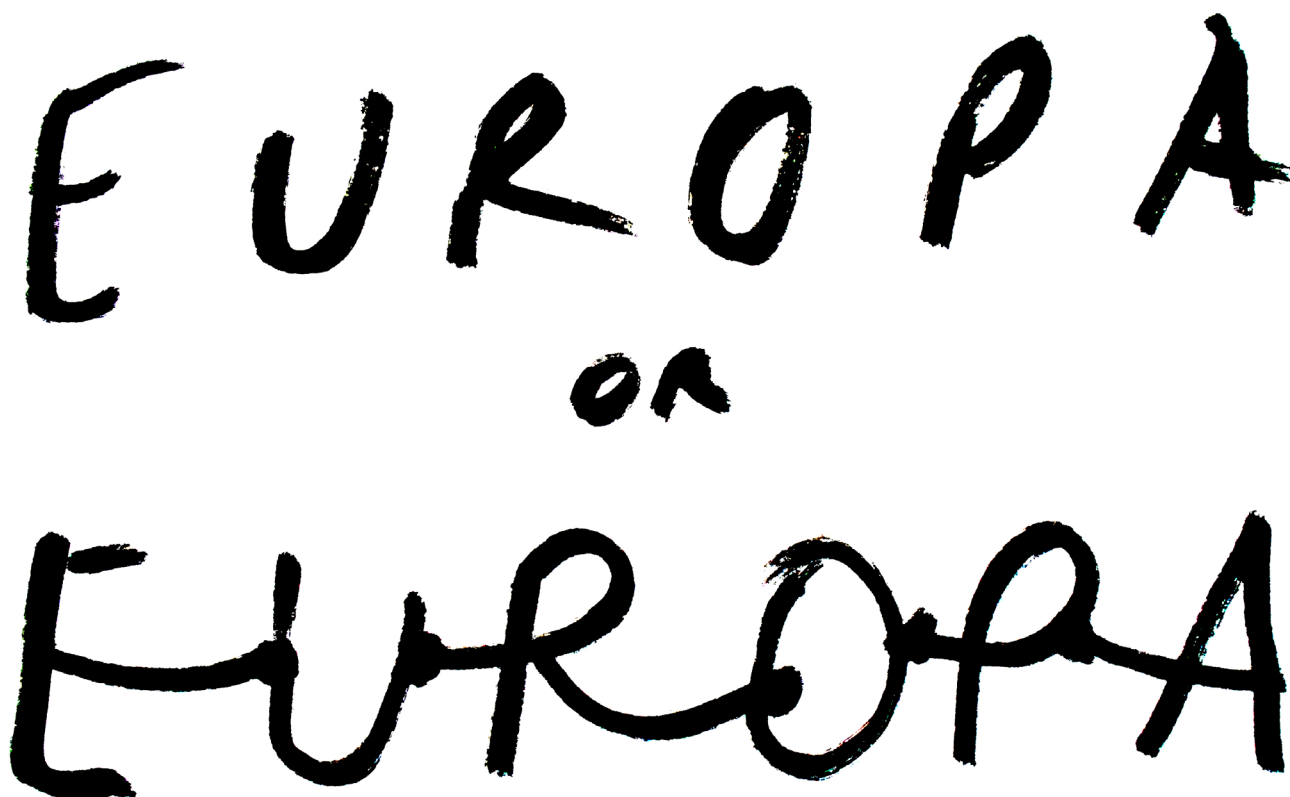
The introduction of **transnational lists** in European elections would also change the way citizens vote. Citizens would have two votes, one as before, for a representative in the European Parliament elected at the national level, and the second vote for a representative elected in a **single European constituency**. Diversifying options would be beneficial, as citizens would be able to vote for people who would not normally be on the ballot in the current system. The transnational lists will have to **respect the balance between the countries of the European Union**, and the MEPs elected on these lists will be added to the current quotas of representatives appointed for each Member State.

Moreover, Europeans could find the future President of the European Commission on these transnational lists. Many citizens are disinterested in the European Parliament elections because they perceive them as a distant process with no immediate stake. A reform that would provide a face to this process and an immediate stake such as the appointment of the President of the European Executive,

would increase interest in the European elections and confidence in the European democratic system. All the more so, as the person whom the citizens vote directly could also become the President of the European Council, in the case in which the two presidencies would be merged.

Over time, extending the qualified majority rule in the Council and transforming the European Parliament into an equal partner of the Council in decisions regarding all areas would lead to the strengthening of European democracy, the simplification and efficiency of the European institutions, and thus a better understanding of the decision mechanisms.

We believe that these proposals need to be debated at the Conference on the Future of Europe. Although these are sensitive topics, which may require amendments to the Treaties to be implemented, it is necessary to discuss them.



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Justice, Schengen, rights and freedoms

Ramona Strugariu



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Justice

What doesn't work well?

Well-functioning justice systems are one of the core structural conditions on which Member States base their policies of sustainable growth and social stability. In line with the Justice Scoreboard, the EU encourages Member States to improve the effectiveness of their national judicial systems in the context of the **European Semester**, the EU's annual cycle of economic policy coordination. According to a Eurobarometer survey from July 2020, Romanians' trust levels in the judicial system has weakened, with 45% having a rather bad or very bad opinion about the independence of both judges and courts, hence strengthening the judiciary must become a priority.

The COVID crisis, apart from highlighting the need for digitalization, has had a major impact on the functioning of the national justice systems by negatively affecting the EU cross border cooperation.

This has, in many cases, led to substantial obstacles for citizens to access justice.

Furthermore, the pressure on the rule of law as an institution causes general confusion and lowers the confidence of the Member States, legal professionals and citizens. Justice professionals note that the risks posed

The European Semester

is the main instrument for coordinating economic, fiscal and budgetary policies in the EU. Each year, the European Commission analyzes in detail the situation of the Member States in terms of economic and structural reforms and offers **country-specific recommendations** for the next 12-18 months.

by authoritarian, populist or criminal behaviour must be combated at both the European and local level, with the distinction that the distribution of resources, information, legislation, institutional cooperation is not homogeneous.

What are the solutions we propose?

Free access to justice is an essential principle for any democratic society and must be guaranteed by the Member States in a real and effective way. In addition to the right of every citizen to take legal action to defend his rights, **we must ensure a solid and coherent framework for the protection of victims.** Victims of crime in particular, but also people who are often discriminated against or in a vulnerable situation, as well as children, need to receive free legal aid in a way that is much more coherent and tailored to their needs.

The Justice Program under the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 provides the Member States with **funds dedicated to facilitating effective and non-discriminatory access to justice.** The next step towards a future Europe of justice is for these funds to be increased, diversified and to be substantiated by Member States' firm commitments to legal aid programs specifically dedicated to victims of crime, children and people in vulnerable situations.

The Multiannual Financial Framework

or the EU's long-term budget sets out the European Union's investments, over a period of five to seven years, in projects and programs that strengthen the Union's priorities.

Prioritizing data collection relevant to justice systems from credible, diverse and objective sources.

We can achieve this by optimizing and extending the use of the information analysis through the European Union Justice Scoreboard. It has been found that effective justice systems, which follow the rule of law, have a positive economic impact. Where judicial systems guarantee the exercise of rights, creditors are more likely to lend, opportunistic behaviour is discouraged, transaction costs are reduced and businesses are more willing to invest.

Ensuring an effective framework for combating white-collar crimes, as well as those characteristic of organized groups, is a necessary direction. In the field of white-collar crime, there are signs of institutional weakness due to lack of a clear framework for action for institutions such as OLAF, EPPO and the Court of Auditors.

- **OLAF currently has the capacity to carry out complex investigations, but cannot make the results public** if the Member State, once notified, does not take any action. As a result, **we have a thorough investigation** in only **about 45% of cases**, thus OLAF must acquire this prerogative. Furthermore, the OLAF report should be sufficient evidence to determine sanctions against a Member State.
- **The European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO)** is due to become operational on 1 June 2021, but the quality of the investigation and prosecution work will depend on the resources made available, cooperation of the Member States, and the competences assigned and coordination with the other European institutions.
- **The Court of Auditors** needs a **broader and clearer audit mandate** that includes all EU institutions and bodies established by the Treaties, but also all intergovernmental structures that are essential for the functioning of the EU.

These institutions should not only be operationalized at the level of interoperability but should gain the necessary weight to determine the decision-making process through the data they collect. It is not enough to just function, it is necessary to make informed decisions.

The extension of Europol's secure information exchange network to all competent structures involved in the fight against organized crime is another goal. The extension must be accompanied by interoperable databases, harmonized procedures and swiftly met deadlines. Identifying and dismantling criminal networks as well as strengthening the capacity to fight cross-border crime will remove some of the pressure on the rule of law by fighting corruption, removing sources of funding for the criminal environment and increasing the security of the citizen. **The operational and technical extension** will have to be synchronized with an **extension of the involvement of the European institutions** to align the standards of legislation, interinstitutional cooperation, access to data and uniform training so necessary to ensure the safety of all European citizens.

If the **cross-border integration** of these institutions is the **first natural step** towards increasing security, the **second**

concern should certainly be to **safeguard against possible abuses through the use of European infrastructure**. Such an integrated system, once perfected, can irreparably affect the destiny of the person involved.

Currently, the digitization level in the justice system is limited, and the solution is a digital conversion of institutions so that citizens are guaranteed transparency. It is more important than ever to have a modern and digitized system of judicial cooperation. The citizens must be able to share information, requests and easily receive feedback to guarantee access to justice. The development of the institutional capacity to strengthen a climate of security for citizens will be achieved through functional systems of sanctions and instruments of confiscation, seizure. Digital Europe will be a tool for convergence between the Member States. At stake is the protection of personal data by assuring confidentiality, resolving cases more quickly through the use of video conferencing and online evidence management in the presence of an electronic decentralized computer system, made of interconnected national computer systems, for sharing documents and requests between the Member States without intermediaries.

Schengen

What doesn't work well?

The Schengen area is one of the main achievements of the European project, which allows the unrestricted movement of over 400 million people, with a paramount value for both citizens and businesses. It is a unique space in history and in the world. However, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, most Member States have reintroduced controls at internal borders or closed such borders, in part or in full, including for European citizens

and their family members. These controls have affected the rights and freedoms of citizens enshrined in European Union law.

Another aspect that makes the **Schengen area not fully functional** is that 14 years after joining the European Union, **Romania**, along with 3 other Member States, are not yet part of it, although all the necessary conditions for the full application of the Schengen acquis have been fulfilled by Romania since 2011.

What are the solutions we propose?

First of all, we constantly call on the Council and the Member States **to complete the Schengen integration of all EU Member States**. The Council is due to present a new draft decision on the full application of the provisions of the Schengen acquis in Bulgaria and Romania as soon as possible. Only through solidarity, responsibility and mutual trust between Member States can the future of the Schengen not be fragmented.

Secondly, a quick return to **a fully functioning Schengen area** is essential. The Commission must take over the coordination of actions at the European level, aiming at the **unitary approach** that the COVID-19 crisis presents to the health of European citizens while maintaining the Schengen area as an uncontrolled area at internal borders, especially in the context of digital green certificates.

Thirdly, we call on the Commission to draw up a proposal **to reform the Schengen governance**, adapted to the new challenges, leading to the strengthening of mutual trust between Member States and the guarantee of effective legislative instruments that would allow a coordinated and unified European response challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, while maintaining the right to free movement and the absence of internal border controls.



Rights and freedoms

What doesn't work well?

Protecting European values is at the heart of European citizenship and is embedded in the DNA of European identity. **Liberal democracy is currently undergoing strong attacks from both inside and outside the European Union.**


Protecting and promoting the rights and freedoms of European citizens should be a major political priority as this is synonymous with protecting the European project itself. Democracy, fundamental rights and the rule of law are not just abstract ideals, they are essential, in very concrete terms, for the functioning of the Union.

The decline in the rule of law and fundamental freedoms in some Member States can seriously affect the mutual trust so necessary for cooperation at the European level, especially in the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice and jeopardizes the achievement of the objectives of the Union as defined in Article 3 of the Treaty. Respect for fundamental rights is vital for common migration and asylum policies, as well as for police and judicial cooperation. And the rule of law is not only a guarantee of respect for the rights of every European citizen, but it is also essential for the completion of the European common market and investor confidence.

The crisis of the rule of law in several Member States poses an existential threat to the European

project and calls into question existing institutional and procedural guarantees at the European level. Although, over time, the European Union has gradually adopted a series of instruments designed to defend European values (introduction of Article 7, European Rule of Law Mechanism, Annual Report on the Rule of Law.) European citizens find that the systematic destruction of the rule of law in some Member States has not been addressed at Union level. **Many Europeans feel that the EU has been politely debating for years how anti-democratic developments in the Member States can be stopped without anything concrete happening.** Both Hungary and Poland are currently subject to extended Article 7 proceedings before the Council to determine the existence of a clear risk of a serious breach of the rule of law by the Polish authorities (notified by the Commission in 2017) and a clear risk of a serious breach by the Hungarian authorities of many of the EU's core values (sent to the Council by Parliament in 2018). These procedures remain blocked in the Council, and the situation in these two countries is only deteriorating.

As the experience of recent years shows, **corruption with European funds and the slippage in the rule of law are closely linked.** European action to protect the rule of law and fundamental rights must therefore be targeted where corrupt politicians will be hurt the most. According to a recent survey, almost eight in ten Europeans (77%) support the idea that the EU should **provide funding to Member States only if the national government implements the rule of law and democratic principles.** The December 2020 Regulation establishing a general conditionality regime for the protection of the Union budget must be applied urgently and consistently.



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What are the solutions we propose?

The Joint Declaration on the Conference on the Future of Europe explicitly mentions “European rights and values, including the rule of law” among the topics to be addressed. The Conference on the Future of Europe is therefore **a unique opportunity, working together with European citizens, to find answers to the crisis of the rule of law in Europe.**

STREAMLINING THE PROCEDURE FOR ARTICLE 7

The Council’s inability to protect the Union’s values is regrettable and has facilitated the disregard by Member States subject to this procedure. The Council’s hesitations can be circumvented by reviewing the following issues:

- **Elimination of the unanimity rule and realignment of the majorities provided for in paragraphs 1 and 2 of this article**

Unanimity in the European Council is needed today to determine the existence of serious and persistent breaches of the Union’s values, while a four-fifths majority of Council members and the consent of the European Parliament are needed to determine a clear risk of a serious breach. These high thresholds for activation today make the mechanism, also called the “nuclear option”, difficult to use. Realigning majorities to four-fifths for both would provide more flexibility.

- **Introducing clear timelines for the adoption of sanctions to prevent proceedings from dragging on without substantial results.**

ENSURING COMPLEMENTARITY AND COHERENCE: A EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK FOR THE PROTECTION OF DEMOCRACY, THE RULE OF LAW AND FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

The European framework for the protection of the rule of law is today like puzzle pieces that do not intertwine well enough. **The annual rule of law report**, a monitoring cycle applicable to all Member States launched in September 2020, **must become the central pillar of coherent and determined action to protect the Union’s values.** In order to prevent regressions in the rule of law, beyond descriptive elements, **it must contain a serious assessment of the situation and country-specific recommendations**, with clear objectives and implementation deadlines. The annual rule of law report could thus be used to concretely apply budgetary conditionality.

The Conference on the Future of Europe could be a decisive moment for the **establishment of an EU mechanism for**

democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights, in the form of an interinstitutional agreement integrating the Union’s currently disparate arsenal of instruments. The European Parliament has called for this since 2016 and has clarified its position in 2020, extending it to democracy and fundamental rights. **This would replace the various instruments, including the CVM and the rule of law mechanism**, and be strengthened by “clear country-specific recommendations, with a timetable and objectives for their implementation”. Infringements would lead to the measures provided for in Article 7, infringement proceedings or the implementation of budgetary conditionality.

This coherent mechanism would also allow the **European Parliament to be involved in Article 7 hearings.** The European Parliament is currently excluded from hearings under Article 7, even when it is the institution that initiated the procedure, as was the case with Hungary. The additional political pressure exerted by the European Parliament is a necessary ingredient for speeding up procedures.

The Interinstitutional Agreement would also mark the solemn commitment of the main actors in the Article 7 procedure to apply it seriously, respecting the prerogatives of each institution and promoting sincere cooperation between them. The European institutions should agree on ways to increase the effectiveness of hearings, including their regular organization.

STRENGTHENING PRESS FREEDOM AND MEDIA PLURALISM AT THE EUROPEAN LEVEL

Pluralism and freedom of the press are essential vectors for the rule of law, democratic accountability and the fight against corruption. The European Commission is analyzing the situation regarding the independence of regulators, media ownership, public advertising, the safety of journalists and access to information. However, the EU does not have its prerogatives in this area, and the Commission relies on internal market rules to promote and protect media pluralism and to support the media sector. In the context of the growing violations of press freedom and attacks on journalists in Europe, this fragmented approach is insufficient. We, therefore, propose **expanding the Union’s shared competences to cover this sector**, as well as **creating a European Press Freedom Observatory** to constantly monitor the situation in the Member States. At the same time, we support **the establishment of a permanent fund dedicated to supporting investigative journalists and a European rapid alert platform** for journalists threatened in the Union.



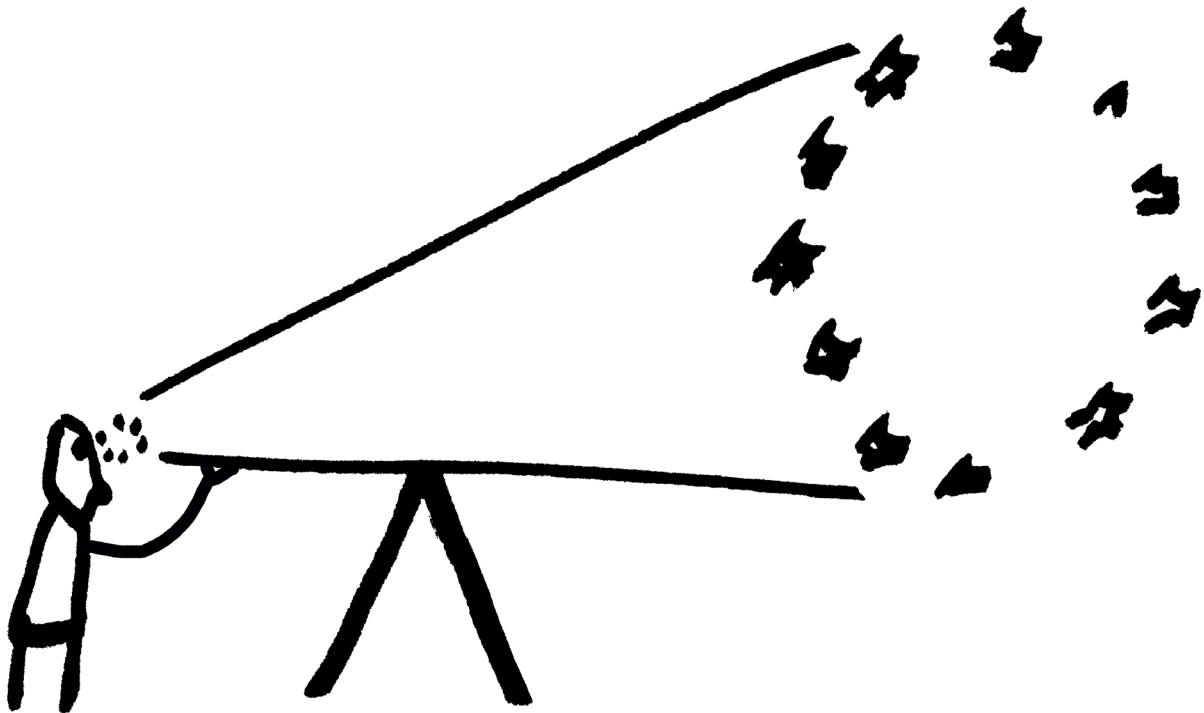
What will change for you?

The proposed changes will provide both **guarantees of trust for citizens in the judiciary and professional guarantees for those who dedicate their lives to protecting common European values such as freedom, democracy, equality, human dignity, respect for human rights and the rule of law.** The European Union must provide its citizens with the security, well-being and quality of life they expect, and professionals with the necessary framework to be able to play their role in combating cross-border crime and extremist behaviour as effectively as possible.

The accession of Romania and the other states to the Schengen area will undoubtedly bring advantages for both tourists and freight carriers, by removing the control of travel documents. Roads by plane, train, bus or personal car will automatically become shorter, and in the case

of carriers, even cheaper. The economy will reap these full benefits. Romania will become the most important Schengen border as a geostrategic positioning in the entire Union.

According to the Eurobarometer survey on the Future of Europe, 32% of Europeans consider respect for democracy, human rights and the rule of law to be the Union's main asset. In 14 European countries, it is considered the most important asset of the Union. The proposed changes will help **maintain the Union as a true champion of freedom and justice in Europe and in the world.** A functional and efficient mechanism in terms of democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights, which **will replace the CVM mechanism for Romania**, once the obligations in terms of justice and the rule of law are met, are essential milestones in this process.



3

Environment and health

Nicu Ștefănuță



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The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us the devastating effects of a global crisis. The consequences of a health crisis, through the domino effect on other sectors and eventually , on every aspect of our daily lives, can be an opportunity for us to imagine the consequences of a climate crisis too. A crisis we've been constantly warned about by the scientists and whose effects we can already feel.

The pandemic should be seen as a learning experience and a call to accelerate the transition to a green economy in order to stop, or at least slow down, global warming. 1.5 degrees and 2030 are the key figures. Global warming by more than 1.5 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial levels is unanimously considered by the scientific community as the point beyond which climate change will be irreversible. 2030 is the time frame until when we can still act. We are in a state of climate emergency, which is why **the European Green Deal is our chance to completely overhaul an economic model that is centred on resource consumption and pollution with a sustainable one.** Emerged as a consequence of the health crisis, Next Generation EU is an opportunity for all Member States to take this step without leaving anyone behind.

We need to act swiftly to combat climate change, biodiversity loss, plastic pollution, and cross-border threats to public health.

The European Green Deal

Is the EU's roadmap to achieving a **sustainable economy**, one that will achieve the ambitious goal of becoming **climate neutral by 2050.**

Environment

The voice of scientists is heard today beyond the circle of specialists. More and more citizens, especially young ones, understand the danger the planet is in and are campaigning for a clean environment, for environmentally friendly behaviours, so their views must be integrated into the future policies of the Union and the Member States. The future is theirs, it belongs to the children and the youth.

When the European Green Deal was launched in December 2019, the general feeling was one of revolution. The goals of the pact are impressive: zero net emissions by 2050, stricter climate targets for 2030 and no less than “zero pollution” in air, water and soil.

But this bold Marshall Plan for nature and health can only be achieved through a clear commitment from the Member States.

Current difficulties

Since the early 1970s, EU environmental legislation has been constantly evolving and today it holds different measures and tools.

The extended scope of EU environmental legislation has led to relatively comprehensive coverage of environmental protection requirements, although the extent to which it is effectively protected is debatable.

In general, one of the fundamental issues of environmental law is how to achieve an adequate level of protection at the European level, while also considering the economic and social impact. Economic differences between Member States have direct implications for the ability to protect the environment and the fight against climate change. Wealthier states can more easily bear the green transition, while poorer states with lower investment capacity will often be reluctant. Hence the need, in the future, for stronger solidarity between Member States.

The 1998 Aarhus Convention strengthened the existing approach in EU law, according to which the public needs wide access to environmental information. At the same time, it has challenged the Union to provide adequate access to justice for NGOs, citizens and other actors, which is needed to draw attention to non-compliance with environmental legislation by private and public actors. **The revision of the transposition of the Aarhus Convention** into EU law must ensure access to information, compliance with public participation procedures and recognition of the procedural capacity of NGOs.

The EU’s competences raise several questions and sometimes have unclear limits on how the EU can legislate on the environment.

What can change?

An important question concerns how much the EU takes its environmental policy into account when drawing up its general policies. In this regard, it would be important to always include an environmental impact study whenever the Commission drafts new legislation in line with Article 11 of the TFEU. Another aspect to be improved is the clear delimitation between EU competences and national ones, while respecting the principles of proportionality and subsidiarity. This is important whenever the EU wants to solve a structural problem of a cross-border nature, which would result in added value for environmental protection. In the future, given the transboundary nature of climate change, **the EU should be able to intervene proactively in areas such as forests, biodiversity, ecosystems, water**, with coercive regulations.

By way of example, an important and necessary step is **to recognize the Union’s attributions with regard to forest protection**, which is currently a national competence. Following the studies and journalistic investigations that documented the disastrous state of the European forests, with special emphasis on Romania, it became clear that the European Union’s forestry sector is a matter of strategic importance.

There’s currently no common forestry policy equivalent to the common agricultural policy or the common fisheries policy. However, this does not mean that the competence lies exclusively with the Member States, but rather there’s a range of competences shared between the EU and its Member States - currently listed in Article 4 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

But the EU has already frequently exercised its environmental jurisdiction over forests and forestry. **A legislative Forest Strategy** could call for the strict protection of primary and secular forests in the EU and better implementation of the Habitats and Birds Directives for the protection of biodiversity. Romania, in particular, could protect its extremely precious fauna and flora, in the context of aggressive deforestation and illegal logging.

In addition, an action plan would be needed for institutions with legislative authority to commit to **improving the legislative process and quality, to avoid disputes due to legislation that is not clear enough.**

Climate change and democracy

The EU must establish itself as a global player that seeks to promote environmental protection not only at Union but international level too. This effort is worth making, given the EU's interest in ensuring its relevance in international environmental governance over time.

Thus, the EU institutions have agreed on the importance of the environment in relation to democratic values. Climate change has consequences that affect basic aspects of citizens' lives, and the scale of these changes can jeopardize democracy and respect for fundamental human rights. It is important how the EU can prevent, assess and amend the consequences of a changing climate without undermining the rule of law or restricting the fundamental rights of people affected by it, such as the right to live, clean water and sanitation, food, health, housing, self-determination, culture and development. The European Parliament has taken action in this regard and has already called on the Commission to ensure that the concrete commitments on human rights, the environment and climate change already set out in the "EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024" are effectively carried out and monitored and that the implementation of the plan also covers the gender perspective.

Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to illustrate the impact of environmental degradation, with serious consequences for health, society, the economy and politics. **Therefore, there is a need for Member States to commit to include environmental rights as a matter of priority in their post-pandemic recovery plan** and to protect those who protect the environment. The EU must also encourage Member States' efforts to strengthen the democratic participation of environmental rights defenders in decision-making processes, including those related to international climate diplomacy.

Given that climate change is one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century, it **must be pointed out that it can intensify existing conflicts of any kind or even generate new ones and create mass migration.** The EU needs to

become more vigilant to the fact that climate change can pose a threat to global security, especially in regions where states are vulnerable and undemocratically governed. Climate change can also lead to land or resource conflicts, which in turn can lead to population displacement. Every year, millions of people are forced to settle in a different place than the one they call "home" because of the effects of climate change. The situation of climate refugees is becoming increasingly severe and difficult to tackle, and unfortunately, the most vulnerable people are always those at risk. For example, women and girls are often victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation as a result of migration due to climate change.

The current environmental challenges have truly dramatic consequences, both at the European and global level. But **democracy, as a protector of human rights and fundamental freedoms and as a fighter against corruption and lack of transparency, is the only form of government compatible with sustainable development and effective protection of the environment and climate.**



Health

The European response to the COVID-19 crisis has shown us an uncomfortable truth. When people criticized the lack of an EU response, we had to recall the limited powers given to the Union in this area.

Although it has integrated public health concerns into all its policies - be it agriculture, consumer protection or security - the Union cannot act directly to save people's lives. Only medical institutions in the Member States have the right to do so. But when Member States have taken unilateral measures to curb the spread of the virus, they have proved not only ineffective but also disruptive to the vital supply chains and mobility of millions of citizens, ultimately disrupting the flow of essential goods and people across the Union. These fragmented efforts to address cross-border health threats are making Member States collectively more vulnerable.

The only way the EU can currently protect public health (by enacting binding legislation) is by relying on non-health-related competences, which are scattered throughout the treaties. The Union has done so over the decades, regulating the placing on the market of medicinal products, food, feed, biotechnology, blood, human organs, tobacco and alcohol, as well as recognizing the medical qualifications and rights of patients to be treated throughout the Union. That has been the EU's public health policy so far: a compilation of scattered forms of regulation, which have emerged over time to enable the Union to function as an internal market for goods, services and workers.

Current difficulties

Although European citizens enjoy the same rights and freedoms, they do not enjoy the same health and access to health services. In terms of health, we see that there is a big gap between countries with strong economies in the West and countries in the East.

The rate of premature mortality and that of preventable mortality are usually above the Union average for Eastern countries, where investments in the health system are also lower.

At the European level, a general package of medical benefits is provided for all citizens, and unmet medical needs at Union level are relatively low. Even so, we can see a disproportion between low-income population groups living in isolated rural areas, much more affected by the lack of regular access to medical services, and

middle-income and above-average population categories. Health education differs from country to country, with a higher level of health knowledge in Western countries than in Eastern countries. The latter also have a very low rate of adherence to general screening and prevention programs.

To truly be a Health Union, disparities between Member States' health systems must be reduced and the European Union must take on the role of guaranteeing equal access to high-quality medical treatment for all citizens.

What can change?

In order to provide a solid basis for any kind of extension of the European Union's action in the field of health, amendments to the Treaty must also be made in this area. The Union must put health at the heart of all political decisions, with the main focus of action being the prevention of premature death and disability, ensuring equal and equitable access for all citizens.

SOLIDARITY IN THE FACE OF CROSS-BORDER HEALTH CHALLENGES

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us the need for a Union that has the **legislative framework in place to enable it to act directly, decisively and promptly to combat various cross-border health hazards** it may face, such as communicable diseases, the spread of resistance. antimicrobials or even attacks with biochemical or nuclear weapons.

The European Commission, through its agencies, the European Medicines Agency and the European Center for Disease Prevention and Control, must be able to inspect, with the help of field teams, Member States' capacities to respond to various health crises and provide support to them to improve the resilience of national health systems.

The establishment of its network of research laboratories to ensure the collection and processing of medical data on its own, under the auspices of the European Center for Disease Prevention and Control, is a necessary step to ensure a Community response to cross-border health hazards.

THE NEED FOR AUTONOMOUS HEALTH COMPETENCE AT THE EUROPEAN LEVEL

One of the lessons of the pandemic is that the **European Union must be equipped with an autonomous competence on health that does not depend on Article 114 TFEU and a more consistent budget** so that European actions have a real impact. The vulnerability of a

health system can become the vulnerability of the entire European Union in the event of a crisis. The revision of the Treaties, which would turn the European Union's objective of protecting human health into an EU competence in this field, would improve the clarity and legitimacy of EU action and achieve the objectives of public health policy.

There is a need for new shared competences that allow for faster decision-making and a minimum standard of health and compliance with health protocols in all Member States. We can talk about the power of field inspection of agencies to check the difficulties faced by national health systems, to help Member States make necessary reforms and to reduce corruption in hospitals. **There is a need for a solid European program, such as EU4Health, with an adequate budget, but which must also come with normative power, with conditions and measures that the European Union can take in the event of inaction by the Member States.**

The EU4Health program is the EU's response to the COVID-19 crisis. By investing € 5.1 billion, the EU Health Program will provide funding to EU countries, health organizations and NGOs to increase the EU's readiness to respond to major cross-border health threats and strengthen national health systems.

INTERCONNECTED HEALTH SYSTEMS

New technologies must be used to increase the level of digitization and interconnection of national public health systems, facilitating the transfer of interchangeable medical data between different Member States, as well as the right of European citizens to receive the highest quality treatment in any Member State.

The standardization and simplification of procedures for the authorization of innovative medicines, the evaluation of health technologies, centralized at the European level (HTA), as well as the stimulation of a domestic pharmaceutical industry, are necessary measures to facilitate the process of marketing new medicines and medical technologies in all Member States.

UNION OF HEALTH AGAINST CHRONIC DISEASES

A true Health Union must have as its main objective the protection of the lives of all citizens of the Union, by ensuring a high standard of health services in all Member States, and by strengthening European programs and public health agencies.

The European Union needs competences to be able to directly support Member States in developing resilient national health systems through **European programs to combat the financial burden of chronic diseases**, such as cancer or cardiovascular disease.

We must ensure equal access to high-quality treatment for all chronically ill people, and the Union must be able to intervene directly in the development of healthcare infrastructure in the lagging Member States.

Combating recurrent drug shortages, as well as the lack of access to innovative treatments, are other major challenges, the solutions of which can be found at the European level, through joint procurement programs for innovative medicines, thus ensuring equal and equitable access for all Member States to new drug therapies.



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What impact will these changes have on daily life?

Well-written legislation does not help the citizen if it is not judiciously applied. The correct implementation of the Aarhus Convention requires more citizen control over interventions of any kind on the environment. We have, for example, consistent legislation that protects forests. However, in reality, they have been illegally cleared for years under the helpless or careless eyes of the authorities. It is therefore important to strengthen the role of NGOs, in particular by recognizing their procedural capacity before the CJEU.

Encouraging and ensuring public participation means more democracy and more power in the hands of every citizen regarding the air they breathe, the water they drink, the forests that surround the locality in which they live.

A proactive European Union, which is concerned with legislation, but also with its implementation, in areas such as

forests, water, biodiversity, ecosystems, waste, means that **each of us lives in a healthier environment.**

In the field of health, we see today an unfair gap between the medical treatment enjoyed by a citizen living in the West of the Union compared to one in the East. An autonomous EU health competence and a consistent budget for this chapter will allow us to reach **a common health standard in Europe sooner so that if you get sick in Lyon or Iasi you have comparable chances of recovery.**

When the pandemic broke out, European citizens from all over the Union looked to Brussels, asking what the EU was doing to help them.

It is clear that the citizens want more powers for the Union because when the powers of the member states prove to be insufficient, expectations move towards the European response.



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4

Cohesion, agriculture, social justice, single market

Vlad Botoș

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Cohesion policy

What doesn't work well?

Unfortunately, currently there are great economic and social differences between Member States, at both regional and local level. Lack of experience, on top of the need for a better technical capacity to raise the standard of living in many communities, not just in Eastern European countries, make cohesion policies and even a strategy at the EU level urgently needed.

There are entire regions in the EU with huge economic potential in various fields. This potential is not only untapped but it is not known and recognized, nor by the authorities nor by the people living in the area. Thus, the local and regional economy is often focused on economic domains that are much more difficult to access, with higher costs leading to a slowdown of the economic progress, and to the wide spreading of poverty, depopulation of areas and ultimately - **inefficiency of cohesion policies**.

What solutions do we propose?

Economic and social disparities can be significantly reduced through **a cohesion policy that is applied to regional and local needs**. The European Union's involvement in these policies needs to be more intense in less economically and socially developed regions, through

offering technical assistance, evaluation and suggestions for the implementation and adaptation of development strategies, even at the regional and local level.

A collaboration between the European Commission, regional institutions and NGOs directly involved in the programming and implementation of European funds would **increase the efficiency of the distribution and absorption of European funds**, while creating results with immediate economic and social impact in local communities.

Cohesion policies will have to adapt to the specific realities of the areas concerned by combining sectoral strategies and policies with specific regional and local strategies and policies, showing flexibility in the allocation of funds and ensuring **synergy between funding programs**.

In the long term, cohesion policies will have to ensure that all Member States and regions adapt to technological, economic and social development, ensuring a balance at the EU level.

Agriculture

What doesn't work well?

In the field of agriculture, we find the **same big differences between regions**. This is not necessarily the result of

different traditional ways of doing agriculture, but from differences in the endowment of small and medium farms in different regions, as well as from the knowledge and information to which farmers have access. One of the major problems is, in many European regions, especially in the west of the Union, that the soil is impoverished by intensive agriculture and increased use of chemicals.

The European Union is moving towards ecologically balanced agriculture to stimulate diversified crops and biodiversity, as well as organic farming, which uses modern, digital agricultural technologies that are as less polluting as possible. At the same time, European policies in this area also address issues related to sustainable rural development.

What solutions do we propose?

One of the main short-term measures in the field of agriculture will have to be the involvement of the European Union in disseminating information on the methods and benefits of sustainable agriculture that take into account the environment, which can contribute to reducing carbon dioxide release through traditional soil cultivation techniques.

In the medium term, it is important that agricultural funding programs focus on changing the way agriculture is done and, in particular, on financing projects that help create economically profitable farms so that those involved in agriculture enter at least in the middle class, without the need for subsistence and social assistance measures.

The farmer, regardless of the European state in which he works, must become an important link in a food chain in which incomes are shared fairly. Agriculture is a vital economic sector, and the status of the farmer must be an illustration of this.

This is where the major role of the European Union comes in, which, together with the Member States, must analyze the situation of agriculture and farmers in each Member State and intervene where national, regional and local strategies and policies do not deliver the expected results. As a consequence, we want greater involvement at the European level where needed.

In the long run, **European agriculture will have to become sustainable**, and to be based on mixed crops that ensure both a stable income for the farmer, no matter what calamities may occur, as well as a very fertile soil - which helps absorb and retain an extremely large amount of carbon dioxide, thus helping to prevent climate change effects.

Social justice

What doesn't work well?

Harmonious development of all types of settlements leads to an increase in the chances of European citizens to prepare for a decent life. At the moment, social justice is rather focused on short-term financial support and is insufficiently dedicated to issues of preparing people of all ages and social backgrounds to adapt to our ever changing society, be it in terms of social or professional life.

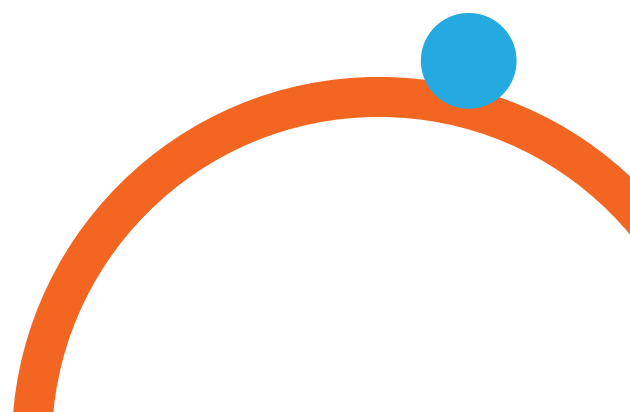
Although the European Union has very few responsibilities in this area, at present we consider it important to have a **wider involvement in the social, educational and cultural field** to ensure a proper preparation for all European citizens, which would enable them to access the single market, labour, the popularization of Europeanism and European culture.

What solutions do we propose?

The European Union currently has no responsibilities in the field of social justice, but given that there is a possibility at European level to analyze different social systems with varying degrees of efficiency, it would be important to have European involvement in those systems which need to be improved significantly.

Involvement can be achieved in two ways: once by **supporting the development, evaluation and adaptation of reforms directed towards dysfunctional social systems. Secondly, it can be done by financing reforms in those social areas that have problems**, mainly in education for up-skilling and adaptation to the job market, and in provision of health services in order to ensure a decent living for retirees.

In the long term, the European Union should become a **supervisor of social justice** and have the right to collaborate in changing strategies when needed.



Internal market

What doesn't work well?

The European single market currently provides a single labour market and a consumer market with around 450 million consumers. The major problems in this area come from the fact that we have a series of non-harmonized laws, as the specific legislation of each state imposes difficulties in trade and services provided at European level, which is a major barrier in the way of a real common market in all areas of activity.

One of the major challenges of the common market is the **legislative adaptation to new technologies, in particular to services and the digital market, affecting both the common market and consumer protection**. We are at a time when companies physically participating in this market are forced to comply with stricter legislation than in many other international economic environments, while third-country companies have access to the market without complying with consumer protection legislation.

What solutions do we propose?

Improving the internal market requires **legislative harmonization in several key areas: services, public procurement and supervisory authorities, including customs services**.

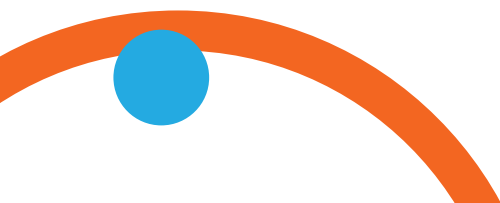
The challenges of the digital market and related services entail the need for legislative harmonization at the European level in these two areas, which have proven to be extremely useful, but at the same time pose major dangers with negative effects on both European society and democracy, as well as on consumer protection.

The field of digital services presents the danger of spreading false news, being part of the algorithms that lead to the economic growth of large social platforms. The European Union must take a united approach to this issue, of economic growth based on the proliferation of false news, to **increase the safety of online browsing** at the European level, but also within all Member States. Although the Digital Services Act, proposed by the European Commission and currently being debated by Parliament and the Council, will have short- and medium-term effects, it is important to ensure a permanent evaluation of the algorithms used by online platforms.

The Digital Services Act

aims to impose a common set of rules at European level on the obligations and responsibilities of intermediaries across the single market, and will open up new opportunities to provide digital services across borders, while ensuring a high level of protection for absolutely all users in the EU.

One of the short-term measures to ensure a functioning single market is to **regulate the digital market by providing a system of fair competition between companies within the European Union**, which must comply with numerous regulations on safety, environmental protection and social justice, and companies in third parties who have to comply with less drastic regulations. Also, the phenomenon of generating online clicks must be eliminated from the digital market, so it is based on fake news, on articles meant to shock and divide society, which most often are not based on real information.





What will change for you?

By adapting to regional and local realities, strategies and funding from cohesion policies, improvements will be felt in local communities, whether we are talking about road infrastructure adapted to new environmental requirements with alternative mobility tracks and green curtains, or we are talking about supporting private investment in domains absolutely necessary for the respective area or improving hospital conditions.

Adapting to new European policies through well-used cohesion funds and creating a modern infrastructure, leads to a raise in quality of life by increasing economic opportunities and jobs, improving the breathing and automatic health of all inhabitants, or beautifying human settlements.

Measures to change the way agriculture is practiced and **the fair and timely distribution of profits in a food chain** will lead to a higher standard of living for European farmers, making this economic area profitable and attractive, and having an effect on rural development as a whole.

Mixed crops will have direct contributions to the economic security of the farmer, but also to reducing climate change by helping ease the intensity and frequency of natural disasters.

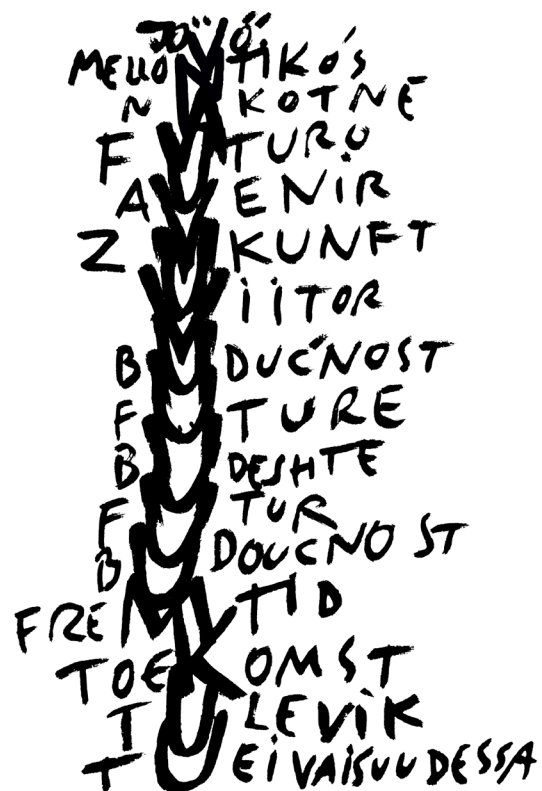
The implementation of measures adapted to the regional and local needs of basic vocational education will reduce the number of people in need of social assistance, will contribute to **the integration into the labour market of a large number of inhabitants and will increase the chances of harmonious development of children in disadvantaged areas.**

Tailor-made health strategies will ensure **a medical system that can meet local challenges,** whether we are talking about areas with many occupational diseases or areas heavily affected by pollution. A well-developed medical system to which all citizens have access increases the safety and desire of people to stay in their cities or villages.

A pension system that can ensure a decent living for those who have worked a lifetime is not only a necessity but also an obligation of the state. That is why the involvement of the European Union where it is needed, where there are major problems, through collaboration and the transmission of information on good practices, would bring with it major improvements that would be felt by all citizens, regardless of whether they are or will be beneficiaries of pensions, and will contribute to creating short, medium and long term security.

An internal market in which public services and public procurement practices are legally harmonized will allow all citizens to benefit from high-quality services from the best companies, regardless of where their headquarters are. Public procurement accessible to all those who can provide services or products throughout the European Union will have direct effects on the quality of services, infrastructure, and products that public administrations and other institutions must provide to the citizens. **The competition given by a real market opening will lead to benefits for all citizens.**

A way to ensure consumer protection by carrying out similar procedures throughout the European Union, including customs services, will make the European single market open to all products and services regardless of their origin, truly creating a market of around 450 million consumers. **The protection of these consumers will be equally ensured, regardless of the Member State in which or from which they purchased their products,** and will also have beneficial effects on European producers, limiting access to products and services that endanger consumer safety on the European market.



5

Infrastructure and budget

Vlad Gheorghe



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Recent developments at the level of the Member States show that few European citizens understand how the European Union influences their daily lives at a pragmatic level. EU membership has increased living standards since accession in all Member States, and the Union budget has made and continues to make a major contribution to **improving the quality of life** of those who live, study and work in European countries. But there are certainly major differences that are reflected in all European statistics, which makes it all the more difficult to raise **awareness regarding the distribution of European money** and the economic and financial contribution of the Union as a whole. And beyond the actual budget allocation, this public awareness at the European level is a key objective in the context of the health, economic and social crisis we are facing. **The Conference on the Future of Europe** is the perfect opportunity to enhance this awareness.

What does not work?

What was originally intended to be a control key for the European Union - **the multiple decision-making bodies** with different decision mechanisms at the EU level - has generated much debate on **excessive bureaucratisation, lack of representation, delegitimization or delayed reactions, lack of practical consequences**, etc. All these, more or less well-founded, criticisms have contributed significantly to the **decline in public interest** in the common decision-making process, coupled with a **crisis of confidence** in Europe's institutions and leaders. In many

Member States, the European Parliament elections have the lowest turnout of all - this was also the case for Romania until 2019. Brexit, the rise of extremist parties, the consolidation of illiberal governments and, finally, the year 2020, when the whole world has been paralyzed by the COVID-19 pandemic represents, separately and together, the signals that the **EU needs to be reformed** in such a way as to be credible and have an impact on public perception in all European family countries.

From the point of view of the Union budget, relevant in this direction is the **reduced role of the Parliament in the decision-making chain**, although Members of the European Parliament are the only ones elected through **direct vote by citizens**. Moreover, the shaping of financial and economic priorities has so far been too much a result of political negotiations closed to the public, and the **effective involvement of citizens** in the allocation of funds for one direction or another has been completely lacking. At the same time, **public consultation** is not proactive, so the participation of civil society, academia, professional associations, and small entrepreneurs in setting budgetary priorities is not substantial, which makes some funding needs not to be identified or sufficiently addressed in the draft budget.

Local authorities are also scarcely consulted in the planning stage at the European level - which poses serious problems in the implementation phase because those in the local administration know best both the needs they have and the

resources they need to be able to access and then implement projects financed with European money. Moreover, **the training and information of civil servants** and administrative staff involved in the management of European funds is a key element in ensuring a fair and complete absorption, while respecting the ethical and performance standards of the Union. However, the current mechanisms are neither sufficient nor proactive, which means that some local governments have a low success rate in using European money in the interest and benefit of the community. And the consequences do not remain exclusively at the local level but affect the Member State concerned and the Union as a whole.

The lack of an **integrated approach** to funding policy at the EU level has meant that much of the allocated funds have been misappropriated or wasted through corruption. In all its forms, corruption impedes or slows economic growth. Corruption costs for the EU economy are estimated at € 120 billion a year - a huge amount, which perhaps best explains why the progress of investments with European money in Member States' infrastructure is often disappointing. Moreover, when analyzing the impact of corruption on major projects, investments in large-scale works (highways, hospitals, etc.), we cannot omit **the increased risk to the security of the respective objectives** of corruption in the access chain, implementation and control. This risk can even lead to the loss of human lives due to poor quality of work. Moreover, corruption not only has economic consequences, but fuels and **deepens social inequalities, erodes trust in public administration, fuels populism, hate speech, extremist manifestations.**

Therefore, the real cost of corruption is much higher than the dry figures in the statistics, and the impact on society is multilateral and with dangerous ramifications, especially in the medium and long term. Some European citizens - in general, those in the Member States that have most recently joined the Union - feel the consequences of corruption to a greater extent, and this creates **new economic and social disparities** between these countries and the rest of the EU. This whole chain of harmful effects of corruption is likely to underline the need to intervene at the level of Union policies

1. for the **prevention** of all crimes related to corruption involving EU funds, from fraud to organized crime groups operating across borders (as in the case of illegal waste or logging, for example)
2. for punishing those proven to be corrupt and **recovering the damage.**

What are our solutions?

At the end of 2020, after lengthy negotiations, the European Parliament approved the EU budget for 2021-2027 and the **NextGenerationEU recovery package**, both totalling a record **€ 1,800 billion**. The USRPLUS delegation

to the European Parliament and the Renew Europe Group have made a decisive contribution to changing the system for allocating European money.

NextGenerationEU

Is a temporary
€ 750 billion EU
 recovery tool designed to
 help repair the immediate
 economic and social
 damage caused by the
 coronavirus pandemic.

Our vision is that **European money** must go to funding priorities consistent with the **needs of citizens**, not parties, governments, national or regional political alliances. The situation on paper does not accurately and/or in real-time reflect what people in the Member States expect to happen with their money, managed by those they voted to represent - either at the European level or nationally. Consequently, we have managed to allocate not only financial resources for the coming years but to truly invest in the future, in full harmony with the concerns and needs of Europeans, as well as with the **principles and values that underpin the European Union**. And this should be a **constant principle** in setting budgetary priorities, regardless of the political composition of the European Institutions in one legislature or another.

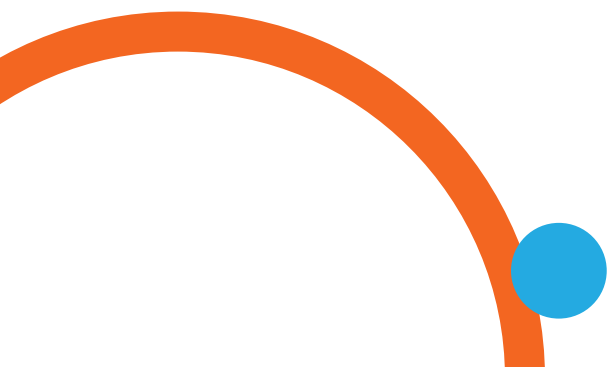
European money - regardless of source or funding program - must make a visible difference in people's lives, which is why we argue that any budgetary policy and the major project must be aimed at: **research and innovation, digitalisation, health and education, defence and security, industry and a green transition, economic cohesion, the food security of the Union**, and should take into account diversity, equal opportunities and gender, with a focus on **migration and the young generation** (including the situation of NEETs).

We support a **green Europe** and we believe that any budget expenditure and any major infrastructure project must take into account **the EU's climate and biodiversity goals**.

Moreover, European budgetary priorities cannot ignore what the Covid-19 pandemic has painfully pointed out - a **Health Union** is needed, and the money allocated to this area, including sums for attracting and training health professionals, and funding to support research and innovation must be a constant source of funding at European level.

The real involvement of the Parliament through the exercise of **parliamentary control**, as well as the operationalization of the European institutions and mechanisms that condition European financing to the **respect of the rule of law principles** constitute new measures that prevent the waste of European citizens' money. **The European Public Prosecutor's Office** is an important obstacle to corruption, which makes the Member States, and the Union as a whole, vulnerable, so we support the operationalization of this new institution as soon as possible. Cooperation between EPPO, OLAF, EUROPOL, the European Court of Auditors and other relevant institutions is essential to protect European citizens and ensure the use of EU funds with unaltered results from criminal activity within a Member State and across borders.

The introduction of **new own sources** for revenue collection in the Union budget is a real reform of the EU, and the first step has already been taken - the new contribution for plastics, following the border adjustment of carbon dioxide emissions, a digital tax and the European system emissions trading. All these changes will bring considerable amounts to the European budget, which will become more **independent and autonomous**.





What will change for you?

The coronavirus pandemic is a disastrous moment in the common history of Europe, but it is also an opportunity to rebuild a **stronger Union** in economic, political and social terms. The post-COVID-19 recovery gives us the **chance for a major change**, it is the best time for those long-discussed and debated reforms that we can now put into practice. And we are forced to do so if we do not want to repeat the chaos generated by the pandemic at the next similar challenge.

The advantages of every citizen following this ambitious European **budgetary reform**, which will be majorly reflected in infrastructure investments, refer to the long-awaited and necessary transitions: **the green and the digital one**. Some of the key requirements for future funding allocations are to the EU's environmental and digital goals - at least 37% of Member States' recovery plans must support the green transition, and at least 20% must support the digital transformation.

Member States' economies will be **more sustainable and resilient** - in short, they will be better prepared to deal with periods of constraints and gaps such as 2020, which has devastated entire industries and deepened the risk of poverty and social exclusion everywhere in the world, and Europe is no exception. It should be noted that economies are not abstract mechanisms or figures in the air - they translate into living standards, jobs, more competent generations and better adapted to and with new technologies, to an environment that favours private initiatives and entrepreneurship, and in a healthy climate, without the costs associated with pollution.

The fight against corruption through new structures at the European level and the mechanism for conditioning the **allocation of resources based on the rule of law** ensure that money that citizens pay in taxes and redistributed through European funding is protected from criminal activity and they will not be scattered or hijacked by irresponsible political leaders, interest groups or organized crime. And that means rapid progress and high prosperity, in line with the record level of investment in this new budget year and, most likely, with the Union's next budget plans. Moreover, the elimination of corruption and crime is unequivocally strengthening the EU's strategic position at the regional and global level, which translates into greater **security and safety for every European citizen**.

All these issues must find their place in the debates of the **Conference on the Future of Europe**, and the aim must

be to transform the solutions identified following the consultations as permanent guiding principles. Beyond the reforms proposed by one parliamentary group or another, we must understand once and for all that coherent, sustained, real information and communication that promotes the active involvement and participation of European citizens is the only viable solution to increase confidence in the European Union and a safe and prosperous future together.



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Economy, labour, digital transformation

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Economy

2020 had major economic consequences that will leave deep scars in European society, which are reflected in job losses, bankruptcy, long-term unemployment and considerable revenue declines for all European citizens. The European Commission's economic forecasts for February 2021 estimates that the European economy will reach pre-crisis output earlier than expected in the autumn forecast. However, the recovery speed will vary significantly across the Union. The differences come from the economic dependency on sectors severely affected by the pandemic, but are also the cause of systemic problems and political decisions that have led to a Eurozone of 19 Member States instead of 27 and to the lack of a Banking Union and of a Capital Markets Union. We can not continue as before. We can no longer get over these facts without taking action.

Economic ambition and governance

Capital markets remain fragmented, making it difficult for European citizens and companies to access sources of financing and investment that ensure competition in the European market. Especially in the context of the economic recovery from the pandemic, a **Capital Markets Union** is essential to ensure the economic resilience needed for preparedness in the face of future challenges.

The banking sector has been tested since the beginning of the pandemic, and to support it as strongly as it has

supported us, we need a **common system of protection of bank deposits**, the last step in truly achieving a Banking Union.

But ambitions cannot materialize if we remain anchored in the same European decision-making process. The unanimous voting system of the EU Council has delayed progress in many economic sectors, especially fiscal ones, and the extremely limited or even absent role of the European Parliament in some places has called into question the legitimacy and transparency of key decisions for European citizens. There is a need to rethink economic governance, which can become more flexible and able to make quick and appropriate decisions for European citizens. Thus, we propose **the transition to a qualified majority-based voting system**, so that fiscal and taxation policies can be better adapted to the green transition and the digital transformation.

Reform of the European Semester

The COVID-19 pandemic has definitely changed priorities at European level and brought to the forefront the vulnerabilities of the European Union, as well as the result of economic, social and institutional discrepancies between the Member States. Discrepancies already highlighted by the European Commission in the European Semester, the main European instrument for coordinating economic, fiscal and budgetary policies across the continent. Each year, the Commission examines Member States' economic and structural reform

programmes in detail and provides them with country-specific recommendations for the next 12-18 months. Unfortunately, only half of these recommendations have been implemented between 2012 and 2019, so we should not be surprised that health systems were only partially prepared, that social protection systems were partially effective and that the European economy was only partially solid.

The Conference on the Future of Europe is the time to acknowledge that we need a reform of the European Semester. We need a functional monitoring framework, aligned with the European Pillar of Social Rights and the European Green Deal. **The European Semester** must not be eliminated, it must not be criticized, but we must restore its credibility and turn it into a tool for coordinating the European strategic agenda.

Recovery and Resilience Facility

The most ambitious financial instrument created by the European Union has taken the form of the Recovery and Resilience Facility, which can serve as a model for redefining the concept of spending European money, but also for proper monitoring of massive reform projects and investments in the economy, society and Member States' industry. The 27 Member States must strive to implement this instrument well in order to regain the trust of European citizens in EU solutions.

The Recovery and Resilience Facility

Is the central element of the European Union's Recovery Tool - NextGenerationEU. Through this instrument, loans and grants of **EUR 672.5 billion** will be made available to the Member States in support of reforms and investments to emerge stronger from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The mechanism can serve as a model of stability and flexibility in the rules of the **Stability and Growth Pact**, and the Conference on the Future of Europe is an opportunity to discuss how we can ensure that funds are managed correctly and transparently and how we sanction fraud.

Enlargement of the Eurozone

The euro has strengthened the integration and economic progress of the European economy, as well as the EU's international role in its relations with other economic powers. However, only 19 of the 27 Member States are part of the euro area, which means that the level of economic convergence expected since 1999 has not reached the desired targets. In the context in which the EU is going through the greatest economic and social challenge since the Second World War, but also through the Conference on the Future of Europe, there is an opportunity to set concrete steps to achieve the EU's economic and social convergence. And one of them is to make a political and economic decision that we want to co-opt the remaining Member States into the euro zone. The euro zone needs **a flexible mechanism through which countries wishing to adopt the euro can have access to, and can test certain monetary policies in order to meet the convergence criteria and to truly experience the benefits of the changeover.**

Taxation

A taxation system adapted to the digital environment and the principle of sustainability must be ambitious. And the ambition will be able to materialize when the unanimous vote will be transformed into a qualified majority vote. But in addition to governance, we need to make sure that **existing resources can be improved in terms of collection by standardizing the rules.** A recent European Parliament [study](#) shows that, if full coordination of public spending at the European level would exist, the European economy could earn more than EUR 2 trillion by 2029. Thus, if the Member States were to focus on reforms and worthwhile investments with added to the single market, the digital economy, research, the environment and energy, health and social policies, the EU could provide sufficient resources on its own to meet major challenges.

Entrepreneurship

SMEs are the backbone of the European economy and it is our duty to provide them with easy access to finance infrastructure. The Conference on the Future of Europe is an opportunity to establish more flexibility in European

funds, which no longer requires only public investment, but **constant synergies with the private sector**, in order to create a healthy economy.

Labour market

From a social perspective, the pandemic has been the basis for an unprecedented wave of solidarity, which forces us to understand that this Conference on the Future of Europe must be the citizens' exercise for the citizens, and the politicians' exercise for the next generation of European youth and children. The European Union has always given priority to its citizens, and the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#) was created precisely to illustrate the commitment to EU citizens' well-being and prosperity. However, both the Pillar and the [Action Plan](#) recently launched by the European Commission will only remain words if we do not redefine our understanding of social policies. That is why we propose **redefining the social contract** as the main debate of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

The European Pillar of Social Rights

Is meant to provide new and more effective rights for citizens, based on 20 key principles, structured in three categories: equal opportunities and access to the labour market; fair working conditions; social protection and social inclusion.

Usually, the concept of social policies has always been associated with a left-wing perspective, with aid and benefits, with the national responsibility of the Member States to provide a safety net for those in need. This is the first mistake that needs to be corrected: **social policies are not left or right**. The Conference on the Future of Europe must be the key moment in which the social agenda becomes a priority for all policymakers, regardless of their

political colour. Otherwise, the fear and insecurity of the vulnerable will be exploited by politicians who threaten our democratic values, by populists with messages that will vary from extreme left to extreme right. Given that advancing the social agenda is a matter of preserving democracy, we propose to **reflect on whether the EU's social policy competences are sufficient or whether the momentum needs more Europe in terms of social, educational and health policies**.

Not leaving anyone behind

Beyond the conceptual debate, better coordination is needed. Social inclusion has its roots at the level of the individual, of the community, while the solutions come from the regional, national or European level. The lack of communication between these levels leads to discrepancies between expectations and reality. A person, a child, a family or a community with disabilities, part of a minority or at risk of poverty or social exclusion needs a whole package of measures concerning health, nutrition, social assistance, education, skills for the labour market. If these measures are managed separately and individually, social cohesion will remain just a myth. For this reason, we propose a solid coordination model, focused on the needs of a category, not on the areas of intervention. Thus, there is a need to set up a **European Children's Authority** to coordinate and monitor Member States' efforts to implement the Child Guarantee and to combat child poverty.

Future of the labour market

Many of those who have lost their jobs will have to return to a highly competitive market and get new jobs that require new skills. The pandemic has also shown that digital skills are not just professional strengths, but are necessary to continue working in conditions of social distancing and the impossibility of geographical movement. Unfortunately, according to the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI), only 58% of European citizens have basic digital skills, and in a labour market influenced by digital transformations, a lack of skills limits the chances of decent living and prosperity. For this reason, it is time for a **real skills revolution in the EU**, giving citizens all the chances in order to ensure their income and a decent living.

Rapid change towards a climate-neutral Europe and, consequently, ensuring a fair transition will transform industries, lead to the disappearance of jobs and the creation of new ones. In the context of the 4.0 industrial revolution, people need to be trained, qualified and retrained to have a long-term income and security.

In addition to these challenges, pressing issues need to be addressed, issues that show how necessary it is to coordinate social policies at the European level. Even before the pandemic, 1 in 10 people in employment was at risk of poverty, and they were the hardest hit by the pandemic crisis. Digital platforms create new opportunities for workers, the self-employed, customers and companies, with 11% of the EU workforce declaring to have provided services through a platform. The COVID-19 crisis has accelerated the digital transformation and expansion of the platforms' business models in the internal market.

For this reason, we need **strong platform legislation and better working conditions for people working through platforms**.

Opportunities and access for young people

In particular, the pandemic has had severe consequences for young people, who still have difficulties finding secure jobs. For many young people, entering the labour market will be very difficult in the context of the pandemic, and with a period of suspension or partial resumption of education or training courses. Internships, schools, universities, technical or vocational education have been suspended or conducted online, an environment in which, unfortunately, many young people in vulnerable areas have failed to enter, due to their precarious situation, lack of digital infrastructure or lack of digital equipment and skills. In 2018, 15 million young people in the EU were not employed and did not attend any education or training (NEET) program. That is, 1 in 6 young people had an uncertain future, increased by the COVID-19 pandemic. For them, but also for all those who form the new generation, we must ensure their access to quality education, which will prepare them for the labour market. That is why the **European Education Area** must become a reality and be the cornerstone of the training of young people's skills, abilities and knowledge.

Social economy

Investing a sum of money in something, whether it is financial schemes, property or shares, means that there is a desire to make a profit. But too often a government, a company or a person thinks only of financial profitability, forgetting that social profitability is becoming increasingly relevant in today's economy. In the context of the pandemic, an important step for our recovery is to revise our old concept of investment and spending. Digital transformations force us to invest in people, so a true European budget must allow flexibility and synergies between public and private investment because private investments are those that can highlight

the added value of an investment with social impact. All financial instruments created for social policies, children and young people will become scattered resources if they are not channelled through innovative solutions for social investments.

The complexity of large-scale reforms and policies, such as social policies, has led the Member States to prefer short-term, reactive spending measures. Solutions to include vulnerable groups are designed to keep citizens afloat and dependent on benefits and social support. This behaviour, although easy to implement in the short term, has negative long-term consequences, preventing people from truly coming out of poverty and exclusion. Therefore, it is time to change the mentality and encourage **prevention investments**, which will replace these reactive expenditures and which will offer real market solutions for people's needs. By investing in education, skills, training, qualification and retraining, people receive the opportunity to integrate into the labour market and thus will have access to a world that can break the toxic circle of vulnerability.



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Digital transformation

Digital technologies are already part of our daily life, and during the pandemic they represented the way that we could continue professional activities, and were able to keep our social interaction. Teleworking became the 2020 new style of work, and some Member States had difficulties in implementing this feature not only in terms of lack of digital infrastructure in public administration, but also in terms of lack of skills of administrative staff. At the European level, the integration of digital technologies in companies and SMEs remains at a low level, only 40%.

Digital Single Market

The European Union has not yet reached the technological level of other actors on the global stage. Innovation is missing from the European way of working. For this reason, **massive investments are needed in the research and patents of new technologies, in European projects of cloud computing** and high-performance computing, because these play a crucial role in the development of in-depth learning and research.

Human-centred technologies

Artificial intelligence, blockchain technologies, robotics and automation processes represent components that are increasingly making their way into the labour market, in industries and in public systems at European level, providing greater efficiency and facilitating access to information and services for citizens. However, they can become a factor of social fracture, inequality and even exclusion, if not regulated. The Conference on the Future of Europe offers us the opportunity to **define new**

technologies as an ethical, human-centred concept, and to make sure that their use is based on respect for the fundamental rights, freedoms and values of the European Treaties.

Digital services and markets

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown how vulnerable we are to the deceptive business practices of rogue traders who sell illegal products online, products that do not comply with the Union safety rules. For this reason, online brokerage platforms and services need to improve their efforts to quickly detect and eliminate false claims and combat misleading practices by dishonest traders. Therefore, the way **we ensure that we protect consumers and provide security for users** is a necessary point of discussion at the Conference for the Future of Europe, and for this special attention must be paid to major platforms, especially those that are controllers of information flow.

Industrial Policy, SMEs and Digital Innovation Hubs

Digital infrastructures, high-capacity networks that provide high-quality, fast and secure connectivity are basic needs for the integration of new technologies into the European economy and society. These are proving essential for Europe's industrial future, already on the fast track to Industry 4.0, especially if we want to be serious about regaining our strategic autonomy. In addition to massive investments in infrastructure, advanced digital skills are needed in order for these to achieve their goal. It is SMEs that can make the most out of new technologies to develop a competitive economic environment, and the network of digital innovation hubs and clusters can provide the missing innovation on the European continent.



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What will change for you?

Efforts at European level have been focusing, even before the pandemic, on an economy that is at the service of citizens. But this cannot be achieved without the involvement of citizens in the decisions that will define our economy, society and the labour market in the coming years. The Conference on the Future of Europe comes at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic has left deep wounds, through which we must go with strength and speed in order to heal.

Your ability to contribute to the European project brings direct benefits, both to you and to future generations, to whom you can proudly leave a better future. Open and simplified economic governance, together with a uniform collection of expenditure, will lead to additional resources at European level, which can bring more European funds to the Member States. Thus, many of the necessary projects that have been pending so far due to lack of funds will finally be able to be completed, from highways to the construction of new schools and hospitals. If we manage to use the **Recovery and Resilience Facility** as a model of stability and growth of the European economy, and if the euro area gives up its rigidity and flexibly receives countries that do not yet have the euro to see the opportunities concretely, we can trigger the potential of the Union, and the countries of Eastern Europe will have the same opportunities as those of the West. And we will make sure that this happens in practice through a reformed European Semester, which will monitor the economic and social well-being but also the quality of life of European citizens.

Entrepreneurs will no longer complain about bureaucratic difficulties, lack of funding and support in a constantly evolving world. In a Digital Single Market, they will have the opportunity to truly reap the knowledge and efforts in their field through projects with an impact at the European level. The digital transformation will provide a greater financial reward for researchers, provide funding for the use of new

technologies on a large scale solely for the benefit of the citizens, and the most creative of Europeans will be able to see their achievements used across the European continent.

Any economic growth also brings job creation, which brings well-being and family income that can ensure a carefree life. We all want to have access to opportunities that bring us happiness and prosperity. No one will be left behind if we offer integrated services to all people in a vulnerable situation, dealing with health, nutrition, a safe home, education and skills. Thus equipped, children from disadvantaged backgrounds, people with disabilities or minority groups will have all the chances we can offer in order to access the labour market. And, regardless of the profession, your job will come with much better conditions than now, whether you are a worker on the European market and you will have a fair and compliant salary for your efforts, or you work through platforms and you will benefit from clearer rules.

The Conference on the Future of Europe is the time when the EU should accept that young people and children will become a real priority. Together, we can create a real skills revolution at European level in order for young people to acquire and build their future, and we can set up a **European Authority dedicated to the present and future of European children**.



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Security and EU in the world

Dragoş Tudorache



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The European Union is, by all economic indicators, one of the global superpowers. It is both the largest global exporter and, at the same time, the largest importer. However, in terms of foreign policy, the Union is a global player with a minor role. And when global decisions of major importance are discussed, there is not yet a strong and distinct voice of the “European Union” but rather individual voices of the Member States when their national interests are aligned with those of the Union.

A more efficient decision-making process

The main challenge of the Union’s diplomacy is that foreign policy decisions are taken unanimously in the EU Council, which leads to many important decisions to be derailed or hampered by the narrow and specific interests of one or more Member States. In these cases, beyond the bureaucratic deadlock and the Union’s lack of reaction on the global stage, Member States often seek consensus in other global configurations, which further reduces the Union’s relevance as a foreign policy decision-making and coordination forum. Last but not least, the unanimity mechanism makes the Union more vulnerable to external interference through the Member States with closer ties to Union antagonistic powers, such as Russia and China.

The demand for unanimity in the Council on foreign policy issues is not just a simple institutional deadlock but an institutionalized symptom of the fragmentation of the European Union. For greater assertiveness to the global

stage and a more effective security policy, the Union’s convergence policies are important. We cannot speak with the same voice globally if the economic and security situation of the Member States is different and their national priorities are, in some cases, divergent. However, the ambition must be for the European Union to become a global player with the size of a superpower, and for that, a first step is to **introduce a qualified majority voting mechanism in the Union’s foreign policy decisions**, in the first instance regarding defending human rights and the implementation of sanctions, as the President of the European Commission also called on the Member States in their annual State of the Union Address for 2020.

The Conference on the Future of Europe is also a good time to rearrange the Union’s foreign policy and security priorities for better coherence with the needs of all Member States, which would also facilitate the reform of the decision-making process.

A revitalized and accelerated enlargement policy

The Union influences the neighbouring states through the enlargement policy, the possibility of belonging to the European family motivating these countries to implement structural reforms that align them with the accession criteria. We need a political commitment at the Union level, an accelerated resumption of the enlargement

process, an increase in the Union's capacity to receive new members and an increase in diplomatic efforts and material support for the candidate countries. After the Western Balkans countries, which are the first on the waiting list, the next step is the **extension to the Eastern Partnership, of which the Republic of Moldova is a part**. The European Union can become stronger globally through its influence on candidate countries. Strategic prioritization of enlargement policy can be one of the adjustments facilitated by the Conference on the Future of Europe.

The Eastern Partnership

Is a specific **Eastern dimension** of the European Neighborhood Policy and aims to **strengthen the political association and economic integration** of six partner countries in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus. The partner countries are Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

A strict and coherent foreign policy towards Russia

Globally, the European Union has two strengths: a fixed set of values to which all Member States adhere and the ability to regulate according to those values, which, thanks to the European market of over 450 million consumers with high purchasing power, has a strong impact in the international system. This influence, the strongest foreign policy instrument of the Union, is weakened by the fact that the Member States have different approaches to Russia, an undemocratic actor, whose foreign policy goal is to sabotage the European project, both by bilateral influence as well as through widespread disinformation campaigns. The Conference on the Future of Europe is a good time to **define a coherent and united European strategy for Russia**.

Strengthen and harmonize EU-NATO cooperation

The security of the European Union is ensured by NATO; 21 European states are part of both NATO and the EU. The strategic uncertainty posed by international volatility, new hybrid technology threats, climate change and related crises, and the rise of radical political currents is exacerbated by the repositioning of the US and the EU's ambition to have "strategic autonomy".

This terminology has implications that may jeopardize good cooperation with the United States and NATO and needs to be clarified together with the United States and in the context of NATO. The development of European military capabilities and military doctrine must be complementary to NATO and lead to a fair and agreed sharing of global responsibilities with the United States, especially in the context in which the North Atlantic Alliance must be reinvented to cope with current challenges. The Conference on the Future of Europe is a good time to reaffirm, clarify and strengthen the transatlantic link and EU-NATO collaboration



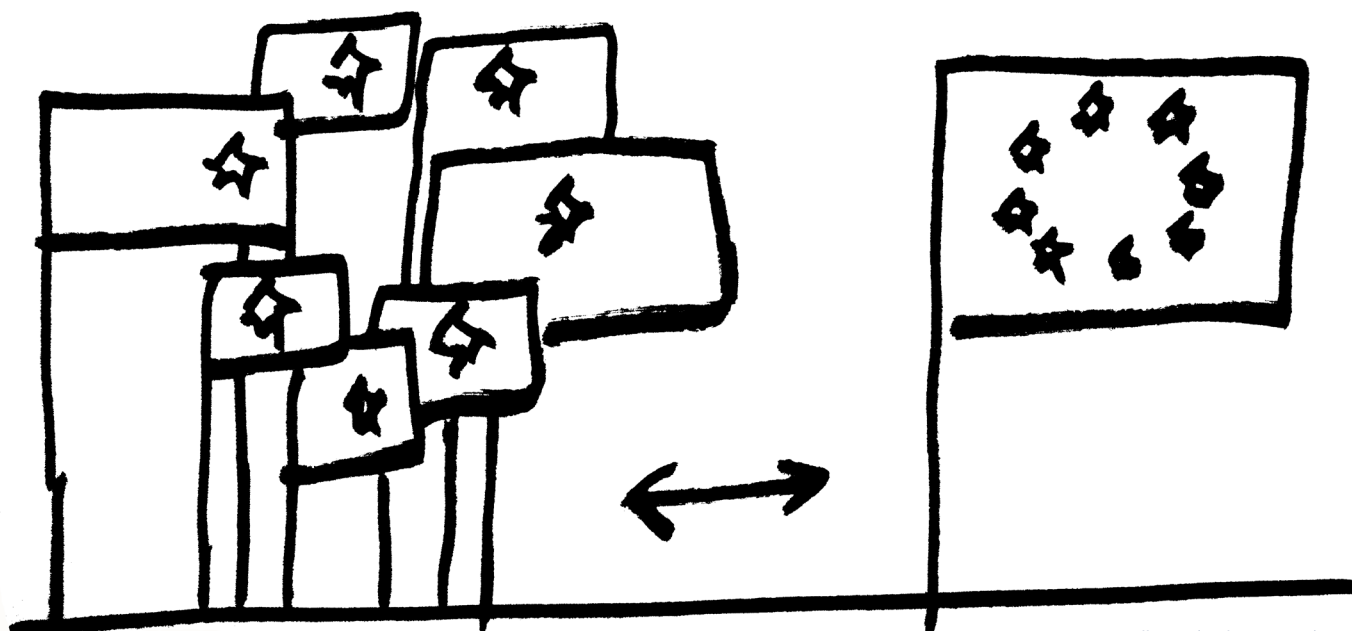
Digital geopolitics

Digital transformation is a geostrategic factor. The countries or global actors that will successfully navigate the transition to a digital age will be the new global superpowers. The COVID-19 crisis has only demonstrated to a small extent the role that technology will play in the future. And in this area, the Union has an advantage as a regulator, but also a great disadvantage in terms of global competitiveness, where the US and China are fighting for supremacy in the digital space. From technical standards to digital infrastructure, to education, innovation and the role of technology in strengthening democracy, the Union must become a digital superpower. The current Commission has begun regulatory work in the digital field but pays far too little attention to the geopolitical dimension.

In the new global configuration, neither the EU nor the US, alone, will be able to offer a viable alternative to the Chinese digital transformation model. To ensure that the digital future is democratic and maintains a rules-based international system, the Conference on the Future of Europe must mark a turning point in the transatlantic relationship in terms of digital transformation. **The launch of a global alliance of digital democracies**, equally supported by the EU and the US, is a proposal that takes shape on both sides of the Atlantic and could be a concrete and direct outcome of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

A single voice in the multilateral organizations

In a world in which EU Member States have, individually taken, less and less external influence, extensive coordination at the level of multilateral bodies is needed. The interests of the Member States could be more strongly represented in these bodies if they were expressed in a single voice, that of the European Union. **A strengthened commitment at the Member State level to give the Union a more prominent role in foreign policy** would lead to better results for each country.



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Conference on the **Future** of **Europe**

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