



Citizens' dialogues and citizens' consultations

Key conclusions



30 April 2019

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‘Europe is above all a Union of citizens.
They are the heart, soul and driving force of our
project.’

Jean-Claude Juncker, 11 December 2018

The current report is based on contributions from hundreds of thousands of citizens who have made their voices heard through some 1,600 citizens’ dialogues and through the online consultation on the Future of Europe.

It aims to inform the EU27 Leaders’ reflection on the occasion of their informal meeting in Sibiu. Feedback and interaction with citizens have also enriched the Commission’s contribution to the Strategic Agenda that will be adopted by the Leaders in June 2019 (*Europe in May 2019: Preparing for a more united, stronger and more democratic Union in an increasingly uncertain world*).

A Union of citizens

Engaging with citizens and hearing their expectations, concerns and ideas has been part and parcel of this European Commission's work from the very beginning. Mission letters sent to all Commissioners at the start of the mandate explicitly called on them to 'be politically active in the Member States and in dialogues with citizens, by presenting and communicating our common agenda, listening to ideas and engaging with stakeholders'. **The White Paper on the Future of Europe**¹, presented by President Juncker on 1 March 2017, opened a new phase with a set of options for how our Union could evolve in the future, thus encouraging an unprecedented debate across the continent.



‘This White Paper should open an honest and wide-ranging debate with citizens on how Europe should evolve in the years to come. The European Commission, together with the European Parliament and Member States, will host a series of "Future of Europe Debates" across Europe's national Parliaments, cities and regions. The ideas and determination of hundreds of millions of Europeans will be the catalyst of our progress.’

Since the beginning of the Juncker Commission, 1,572 citizens' dialogues² have taken place in 583 locations. In addition, on 9 May 2018 the Commission launched an online consultation on the Future of Europe, with questions designed by a panel of citizens reflecting the diversity of Europe.

The European Commission has participated in the 20 high profile debates organised by the European Parliament with national Leaders, has welcomed the major projects of the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions³, and has actively supported the citizens' consultations launched by the Member States. All these initiatives, as well as the ones organised by other political institutions or by civil society, are fully complementary.

The Commission presented a progress report on citizens' dialogues and citizens' consultations⁴ to the European Council in December 2018, identifying seven key domains where Europeans expect a lot from the Union. For the first time, the European Council conclusions welcomed the Dialogues and Consultations and made a direct link with the preparation of the Strategic Agenda.

1 https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/white_paper_on_the_future_of_europe_en.pdf

2 Citizens' dialogues are town-hall style debates. The very first one took place on 27 September 2012 in the Spanish port city of Cadiz with then Vice-President Viviane Reding. They have since been developed by the European Commission from 2013 onwards.

3 <https://cor.europa.eu/en/engage/Pages/Reflecting-on-Europe.aspx>

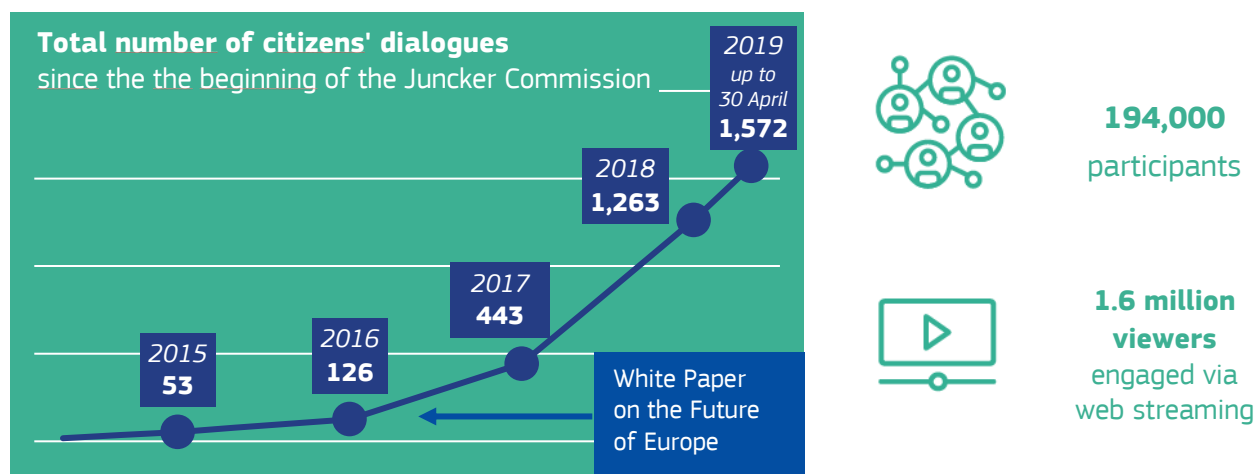
4 https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/eu-progress-report-consultations-111218_en.pdf

The White Paper on the Future of Europe

The White Paper presented by President Juncker on 1 March 2017 proposed five possible scenarios for the future of our Union of 27. The scenarios were not prescriptive, exhaustive or mutually exclusive, and were designed to feed a far-reaching debate.

SCENARIOS					
	Carrying on	Nothing but the Single Market	Those who want more do more	Doing less more efficiently	Doing much more together
WHAT DOES IT ENTAIL?	EU27 implements and upgrades current reform agenda. Priorities are regularly updated, problems are tackled as they arise and new legislation rolled out accordingly	EU27 only deepens key aspects of the single market	EU27 allows willing Member States to do more together in specific policy areas. As a result, Member States agree to specific legal and budgetary arrangements to deepen their cooperation. Other Member states may join over time	Consensus on the need to better tackle certain priorities together makes EU27 focus attention and resources on delivering more and faster in selected policy areas, while in other areas it stops acting or does less	Member States share more power, resources and decision-making across all policy areas, the euro is strengthened, and decisions at EU level are rapidly enforced

The citizens' dialogues



The online consultation



A call for a thriving Europe

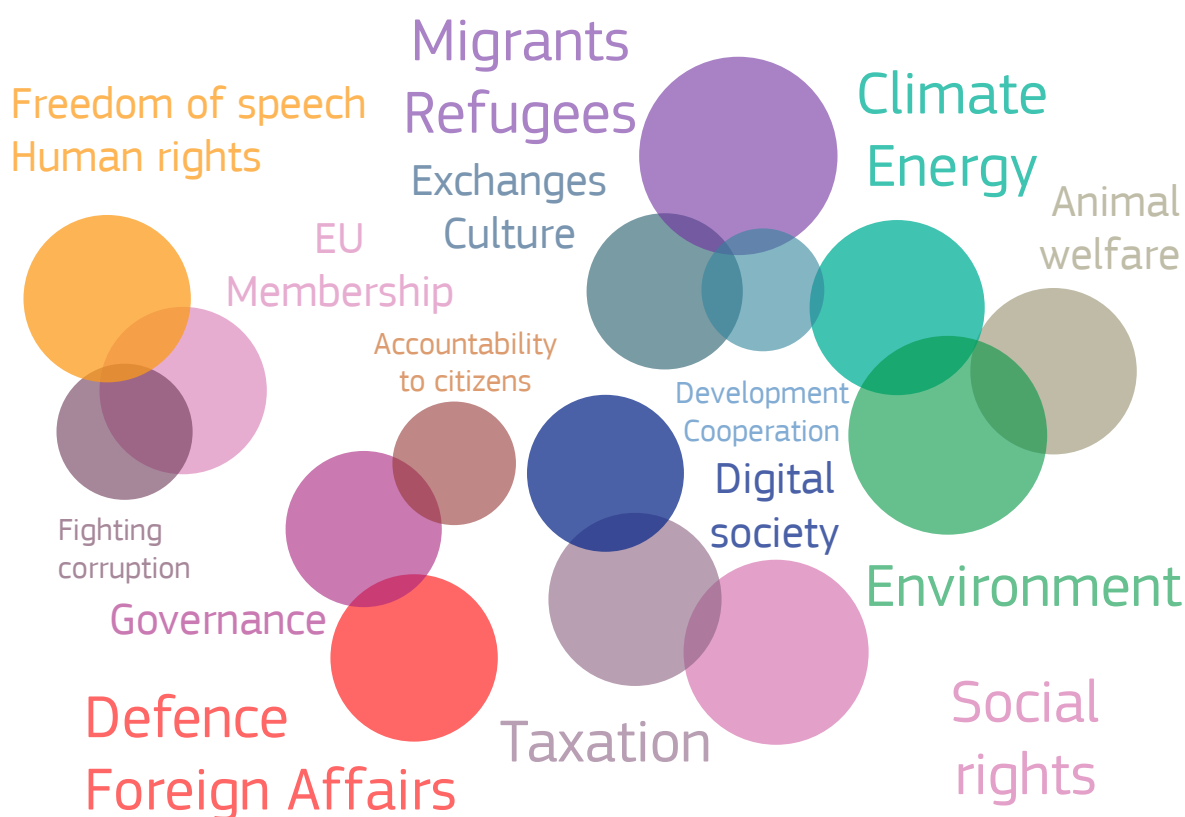




The conclusions of the citizens' dialogues and of the online consultation on the Future of Europe tend to converge, and are in line with the ones Member States drew from their own exercises, despite the diversity of formats.

Overall, participants tend to **perceive the European Union positively**. Opinion polls lead to similar conclusions. According to a Eurobarometer survey conducted among representative samples of the population, 62% of Europeans consider their country's membership of the European Union as a good thing, the highest level in the last 27 years. Only 11% see Union membership as a bad thing, the others being neutral. The Eurobarometer also shows that between Spring 2014 and Autumn 2018, trust in the European Union increased by 11 points (from 31% to 42%), possibly as a result of the new approach of focusing European initiatives on citizens' concerns. Trust in the European Parliament and in the European Commission both increased by 11 points, to 48% and 43% respectively. During the same period of time, trust in national governments went up by 8 points, to 32%.

The European Union is perceived as the **legitimate** and most effective place to deal with **global challenges**. When asked what European decisions would make them proud of belonging to the Union, respondents to the online consultation spontaneously mentioned issues relating to the **environment and climate, migration and refugees, foreign affairs and defence**.

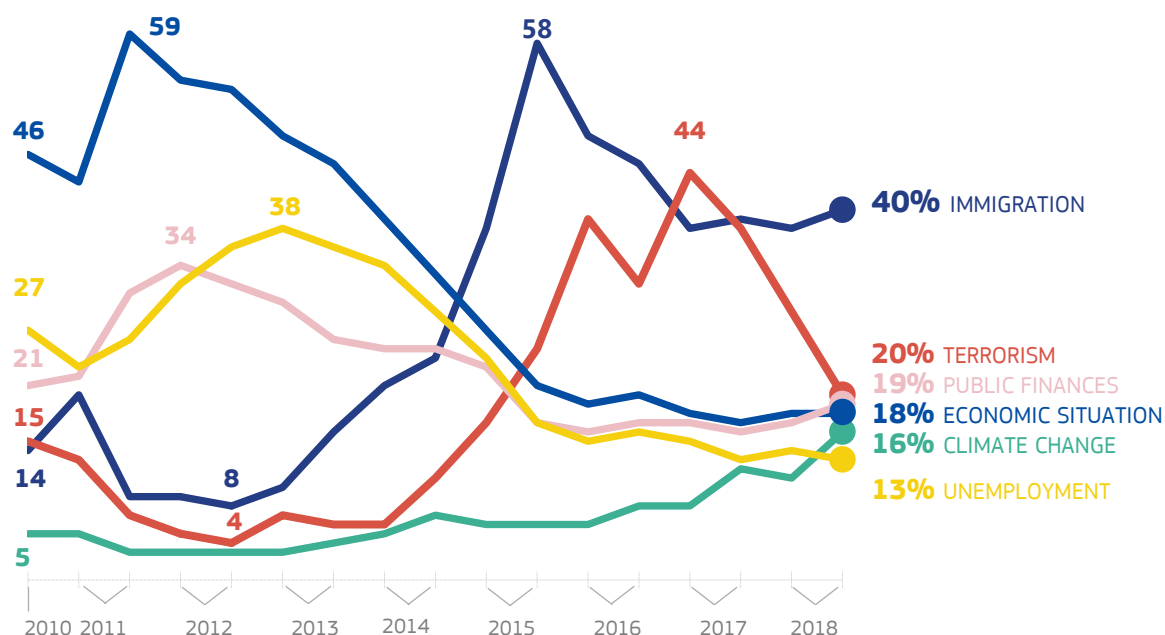


Online consultation

'What decisions taken at European Union level would make you prouder of belonging to the Union?'
(Open-ended question)

Answers have been regrouped by topic using text-mining techniques. The size of the circles is proportional to their frequency and their relative locations reflect thematic proximities.

The Standard Eurobarometer survey carried out in November 2018 confirms that global issues rank highly when respondents are invited to select, in a list of fourteen, the two main issues facing Europe. Migration is still the most mentioned topic, but much less so than in 2015, while the management of migration is bearing fruit. This is consistent with the fact that there have been fewer questions on the topic in citizens' dialogues organised in 2019. Terrorism emerges as the second priority. For the first time, climate change is one of the five most mentioned topics.



Standard Eurobarometer, autumn 2018

**'What do you think are the two most important issues facing the EU at the moment?'
(Maximum two answers in a list of fourteen proposals)**

Only the six most frequently chosen answers are represented in the graph.

Given that Europe has moved from economic recovery to expansion in the last few years, **economic and social** issues play a less prominent role than before the beginning of the Juncker Commission. However, the need for a **dynamic economy**, focusing on digital, research and innovation, and a stable euro area are very present – as is the clear desire for a high level of **fairness and social protection**.

Europe is also perceived as a continent of values where the rule of law, the fight against corruption, and non-discrimination must be upheld.

Brexit has been more regularly discussed in the last few months, but all in all participants in the Dialogues and in the online consultation were mainly eager to discuss the future of the EU27.

All in all, participants in the debate on the Future of Europe would like the European Union to focus on **topics that are already at the heart of the European agenda**, notably the ten political priorities of the Juncker Commission. The Commission's contribution to the Strategic Agenda and the Commission's proposals for the European Union's long-term budget also mirror citizens' expectation.



1. A Europe that protects

Contributors to the debate on the Future of Europe tend to expect the European Union to guarantee their well-being and protect their **social rights**. Participants often call for stronger rights and raise questions about the gender pay gap, parental leave and other social issues, including **health**. While many participants express concerns about rising inequalities, they generally call for the **protection of the weakest** members of society, such as the elderly and low-skilled workers.

Consumer rights are an important part of this call for protection. **Food safety** and the quality of food products are regularly mentioned. Citizens expect trade agreements to respect high standards, including social and environmental ones. Many are worried about what they perceive as unfair **taxation**, especially to the benefit of big companies.

But the need for a more protective Europe is primarily expressed in relation to **crime and security**, with a special focus on terrorism. Fighting corruption is also often mentioned.

“ To be allowed to enter the EU, products from third countries should respect the same quality standards.
Online participant from Spain

Social and fiscal harmonisation is needed to eliminate unfair competition within Europe.
Online participant from France

The EU should help people living in poverty.
Citizens' dialogue in Ljubljana, Slovenia

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- More than 12.5 million jobs have been created since the start of the Juncker Commission.
- In negotiating trade agreements, the European Commission is protecting sensitive sectors and does not compromise on safety standards. Human, labour and fundamental rights are at the heart of our trade policies, as is sustainability.
- Between 2014 and 2020, the European Union has made €86.4 billion available for the European Social Fund.
- The revision of the rules on the posting of workers proposed by the Commission established the principle of 'equal pay for equal work at the same place'.



2. Addressing migration

Migration remains a concern for many citizens, but in recent months the topic has been less frequently raised by participants.

Opinions are polarised, reflecting the diversity of views held by Europeans on migration and asylum issues. A significant number of participants call for an end to **irregular migration** or for the return of migrants who have no right to stay in the EU.

Many call for a more welcoming European Union or call for action to stop the **loss of human lives** in the Mediterranean. The **integration** of migrants and **cooperation** with non-EU countries, notably in Africa, are also discussed. Many participants call for **solidarity** among EU countries or emphasise the need for harmonised sea and land border controls. Many participants in the Dialogues are worried about the manipulation and oversimplified rhetoric used when discussing these issues.

“ There are people outside Europe who need help, because there is war in their country or because they are starving. We can help them.

Online participant from Austria

In addition to refugees, there are people from other parts of the world who are fleeing poverty. Is the EU working together with these countries to help them develop?

Citizens' dialogue in Msida, Malta

Design and implement a European policy for the shared management and protection of land and maritime borders.

Online participant from Cyprus

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- Irregular border crossings into the European Union are back to pre-crisis levels.
- European Union operations have helped save over 730,000 lives since 2015.
- The European Border and Coast Guard deploys around 900 guards to complement the existing capacities of Member States. It could be strengthened in the future with up to 10,000 border guards.
- The European Union is financing programmes in third countries addressing the root causes of irregular migration.



3. A dynamic economy

Participants in the debate on the Future of Europe are increasingly interested in the new trends that are shaping the economy of the future. Many express concerns about how Europe as a whole and individuals themselves will adapt to the **dynamic** economy.

Numerous questions concern the **digital economy and its implications** for the acquisition of skills, the creation of new jobs, and the protection of personal data, with many asking that the strong position of giant players on the digital market be regulated. Artificial intelligence and robotics are also high on the participants' agendas, with Europe being expected both to seize opportunities and to limit possible risks.

Another popular topic is the **circular economy** and its potential benefits.

The need to prioritise and incentivise **research and innovation** is often brought up, along with how to improve access to **finance and investment**, especially for small and medium-sized companies. The benefits of the European budget are particularly discussed in the regions.

Free movement within the European Union is widely perceived as an asset for the economy and for citizens themselves. **The euro, the single market and international trade** are largely seen as opportunities for companies and consumers, although some fear low quality products could be imported into the Union.

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Invest in research and innovation as well as in education.

Online participant from Germany

When will we have world-leading digital champions in the European Union?

Citizens' dialogue in Luxembourg

We should close the gap between rural areas and big cities in high-speed internet provision.

Citizens' dialogue in Jasinka, Poland

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- The European Union has now grown for six consecutive years.
- The Juncker Plan, launched in November 2014, has triggered €400 billion in additional investment, benefitting almost 1 million small- and medium-sized companies.
- The European Commission is proposing to increase investment in research and innovation by 50% in the next long-term budget.
- The European Union is implementing a strategy to develop the digital economy.



4. Fighting climate change, protecting the environment

Climate change and environmental protection are an increasing concern.

Overall, Europeans have little or no doubt that climate change is at least partly due to **human activities**. Participants in citizens' dialogues not only want to know more about the way the European Union is tackling this global challenge, but also about how they themselves can help.

The plans to reduce **greenhouse gas emissions** are high on the citizens' agenda. Despite strong concerns, hopeful comments are also made regarding the development of **renewable energy**, investment in the green economy and **innovation** to help preserve the environment.

During citizens' dialogues, many questions are raised on **waste** management (especially **plastics**), **pesticides** and biodiversity, and on **animal welfare**.

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The fight against climate change should become the number one priority in public policies.

Citizens' dialogue in Lisbon, Portugal

The EU should take drastic measures to protect our oceans.

Citizens' dialogue in Nicosia, Cyprus

Chemical products that have a negative impact on human health should be eliminated.

Online participant from Croatia

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- The European Union is the only large economy that is fully translating its Paris Agreement pledges into binding domestic legislation.
- Between 1990 and 2016, greenhouse gas emissions were reduced by 22%, while the Union's economy grew by 54%.
- The European Commission has presented the world's first comprehensive plastic strategy, with concrete measures to ban key single-use plastic items.
- The Commission is limiting exposure to cancer-causing chemicals in the work place, which will save more than 100,000 lives in the next 50 years.



5. A Europe of values

European **values and identity** continue to be important for many participants. The European Union is largely perceived as a peace project and as an area of **freedom** and **fundamental rights**. Many participants express their concerns about **corruption** and about the state of the **rule of law** in some Member States, with calls for the European Union to react.

The notion of **solidarity** is consistently very high on the agenda. **Gender equality and non-discrimination** are seen as major pillars of our society.

While **trust in the European institutions** has been increasing since 2014, many participants still perceive them as too **remote** and expect them to be more efficient and transparent. Some contributions call for action that would bring the European Union **closer to its citizens**. This includes not only cultural exchanges, learning other languages and teaching Europe at **school**, but also using European symbols such as the flag and Europe Day.

A few months before the European elections, some participants are worried that **disinformation** could undermine the democratic process. Citizens would appreciate more information about the Union to help them better understand and **influence decisions**.



Sexual minorities have a right to security and to a life free of violence.
Online participant from Spain

Information attacks from outside, such as fake social media accounts and trolls, should be an issue for governments, EU institutions and every citizen.
Citizens' dialogue in Tallinn, Estonia

We talk too much of an EU that is remote and distant. However, we are the EU, and if we do not engage, if we do not take part in policies and debate, we cannot expect the EU to get any closer.
Citizens' dialogue in Ljubljana, Slovenia



- The European Union is one of the most advanced regions in the world when it comes to gender equality and the fight against discrimination.
- The new Code of Conduct for Members of the Commission has ensured the highest ethical standards for office holders in Europe and beyond.
- The reform of the data protection rules that entered into force in May 2018 is a major step towards strengthening citizens' fundamental rights in the digital age.
- New rules have been adopted to increase transparency in electoral campaigns, with possible sanctions when rules are not respected.



6. A perspective for the younger generation

Many students and young people take part in citizens' dialogues. They demand more influence in policy-making, especially in light of the recent increase in youth activism related to climate change.

Citizens link this demand to topics such as **mobility**, **education** and exchange programmes. **Erasmus** is consistently and explicitly mentioned as an example, and many participants would like to see it provided with a higher budget. Youth **unemployment** remains a major concern for young people, and many see a key role for the European Union in helping to adapt training provision to new trends such as the digital economy.

In addition to suggestions for a common curriculum and the mutual recognition of diplomas, many see **schools** as a place where Europe should be taught and where the young generation can learn about Europe's **common values**.

“ Develop exchanges with schools through joint work projects using technologies such as virtual classrooms. This would be a way to discover other working methods as well as other cultures.

Online participant from France

Implement a civic education course on basic moral standards, tolerance, and understanding of governance at the EU, national and local levels.

Online participant from Ireland

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- Erasmus has already given over 9 million people opportunities to study, train, travel, volunteer or gain experience abroad. The Commission is proposing to double the budget, to €30 billion between 2021 and 2027.
- Following proposals tabled by the Commission, Member States have committed to fostering the mutual recognition of diplomas, to reinforce key competences such as entrepreneurial and digital skills, and to strengthen inclusive education, the promotion of Europe's shared values and the European dimension of teaching.
- With a budget of almost €9 billion between 2014 and 2020, the Youth Employment Initiative is supporting young people who did not have the possibility to be in education, employment or training.



7. A stronger Europe in the world

Many citizens call for further coordination and consolidation of the European Union's external actions. They want to see both a common **foreign policy** and a common **defence policy**. The pooling of resources for research and innovation is mentioned, some even suggesting a European army.

The European Union is often compared with the rest of the world and participants praise the role of the Union on the international stage. According to a Eurobarometer survey conducted in November 2018, 76% think that the Union is a place of stability in a troubled world.

Contributors often mention **other global powers** such as Russia, China and the United States, sometimes in relation to worries about **cybersecurity** or **trade**. They clearly aspire for Europe to be an equally strong player in the global geopolitical arena, led by principles. Several mention the need to speak with a '**common voice**', while others propose the 'unification' of foreign policies.

“ I hope the EU will manage to have a united front to represent solidarity, cultural diversity, rule of law and environmental protection.

Online participant from France

Harmonising defence policy and foreign affairs objectives would enable the European Union to speak with a political advocacy capacity worthy of its economic weight.

Online participant from Hungary

In order to save money and use it more efficiently, we need to have common technical standards in the defence industry.

Facebook Live Dialogue

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- The European Union is a reliable partner when it comes to defending a rules-based international order.
- The Union and its Member States provide more than half of development cooperation in the world. EU humanitarian assistance reaches over 120 million people every year.
- The European Union currently has 16 military and civilian missions all around the world.
- The European Commission has adopted work programmes to co-finance joint defence industrial projects in 2019-2020. For the next long-term EU budget, the Commission has proposed a €13 billion European Defence Fund.

Citizens' engagement and policy-making

In a fast-changing world, European citizens are aware of the global challenges that Europe has to face, but also of its assets.

They expect a lot from the European Union, which should, together with our Member States, stand by its values, protect its citizens, and be heard on the international stage. Their concerns are already at the heart of the European Commission's actions.

The debate has shown that participants can be at the forefront of change: They are interested in circular and digital economies and in new methods of democratic participation.

Citizens want a Europe that is competitive, fair and protective, fully playing its role in the world, notably when it comes to the fight against climate change and for the protection of the environment. It is with this call for a thriving Europe in mind that the current Commission has taken initiatives since 2014 and prepared its contribution to the Strategic Agenda that will be adopted by European Leaders in June 2019.

The debate on the Future of Europe has also shown how eager many citizens are to express their views and to become more active in the political process. Many tools allow them to do so, including the public consultations and the European Citizens' Initiatives. The European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions also play a key role in making sure that all voices can be heard. It is the responsibility of all institutions, at European, national, regional and local levels, but also of civil society itself to organise Dialogues and Consultations. Representative democracy is irreplaceable, but it can only benefit from the development of new forms of citizens' engagement.

HAVE YOUR SAY

You can participate in the debate on the Future of Europe.

https://ec.europa.eu/commission/future-europe_en



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