

Brussels, 17/05/2021

Mr Guy Verhofstadt,

Co-chair of the Executive Board

Mr Manfred Weber,

Member of the Executive Board, President of the EPP Group

Ms Iratxe García Pérez,

Member of the Executive Board, President of the S&D Group

European Parliament

60 Rue Wiertz

Brussels 1047

Belgium

Ms Ana Paula Zacarias,

Co-chair of the Executive Board, Portuguese Secretary of State for EU Affairs

Mr Gasper Dovzan,

Member of the Executive Board, Slovenian Secretary of State for EU Affairs

Mr Clément Beaune,

Member of the Executive Board, French Secretary of State for EU Affairs

Council of the European Union

175 Rue de la Loi

Brussels 1048

Belgium

Ms. Dubravka Šuica,

Co-chair of the Executive Board Vice-President of the European Commission for Democracy and Demography

Mr. Maroš Šefčovič,

Member of the Executive Board, Vice-President of the European Commission for Interinstitutional Relations and Foresight

Ms. Věra Jourová,

Member of the Executive Board, Vice-President of the European Commission for Values and Transparency

European Commission

200 Rue de la Loi

Brussels 1040

Belgium

Dear Co-chairs and Members of the Executive Board of the Conference on the Future of Europe,

The recently launched Conference on the Future of Europe represents a moment of reflection on the part of the Institutions and the citizens that has no parallel in the Union's decades-long history and,

at the end of which, we must have clear guidelines to define what we want to be and how we want to achieve our goals.

We, undersigned Members of the European Parliament, are writing to you because we believe that, in such a crucial moment, we cannot fail to include our partners from the Balkan countries so that they can once again feel unequivocally and indissolubly part of the great European family.

The enlargement of the EU to the Western Balkans is not only a duty-bound act because of the existing historical, cultural and value ties, **but is also a strategic necessity** because of the central position of the region for European security and the ambition of the Union to become a prominent geopolitical actor. In short, as Commission President Ursula von der Leyen stated during her State of the Union address in 2020, the EU and the Western Balkans **share not only the same past, but also the same destiny.**

The impetus given by the Council's decision to open negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia clashed with the Bulgarian veto, and the COVID-19 pandemic **exacerbated certain geopolitical trends that were already underway.** Moreover, owing to the geopolitics of vaccines and infrastructure, the pandemic has amplified the role of other actors in the region, ready to exploit the political vacuum – at least perceived by our partners – left by the EU.

We believe we need a change of pace: **we need decisive action so that this disaffection does not become a real alienation.** It is indeed extremely important to value the progress made by the so-called Balkan Six in achieving the European *acquis* and to turn it into opportunities rather than merely dwelling on shortcomings.

The European Parliament has always been at the forefront of efforts to facilitate relations between Brussels and the individual capitals of the Balkan Six through parliamentary diplomacy, such as multilateral parliamentary assemblies, inter-parliamentary delegations and joint parliamentary committees and, more generally, with an all-round support that has never wavered.

Furthermore, our Parliament, in the process of adopting the annual progress reports on the enlargement countries, asked the Commission and the Council to **identify the most appropriate instruments to include the six countries of the Western Balkans** in the Conference on the Future of Europe that started on 9 May.

Our call was not fulfilled in the European Council act of 11 May on the consolidated version of the Rules of Procedure of the Conference on the Future of Europe, and, unfortunately, no role for the Western Balkan representatives was envisaged within the framework of the Conference.

Therefore, we are calling on you to consider the urgent adoption of the following proposals to ensure a real involvement of the institutional representatives and the civil society of the Western Balkans in the Conference on the Future of Europe:

- **Inclusion of the political and institutional representatives of the Western Balkans as Permanent Observers to the Conference Plenary** and in all the related bodies and *fora*: we are proposing to amend the Rules of Procedure to institutionalise the presence of observer delegates from national parliaments and governments of the Western Balkans with the same criteria adopted for EU

Member States.

- **Inclusion of civil society and young people from the Western Balkans in all the European Citizens Panels and the other discussion *fora* planned:** we are proposing to amend the Rules of Procedure to ensure their presence with the same criteria as those adopted for civil society and young people from EU Member States.
- **Lastly, a proposal for a European Citizens Panel on EU enlargement:** we call on the Executive Board to convene a European Citizens Panel with a specific focus on the enlargement of the European Union, according to art. 5 of the Rules of Procedure.

Dear Co-chairs and Members of the Executive Board,

On the streets of Tirana, Sarajevo, Pristina, Skopje, Podgorica and Belgrade, there are many young people dreaming of a European future for their countries, and not allowing them to take part in the greatest moment of exchange in the history of the Union would mean betraying their trust and dampening their convictions.

We hope in your strong support for this cause, and we thank you for considering these proposals.

Yours Sincerely,

Fabio Massimo CASTALDO (NI)

Dorien ROOKMAKER (NI)

Ilhan KYUCHYUK (Renew Europe)

Irena JOVEVA (Renew Europe)

Vlad GHEORGHE (Renew Europe)

Danuta Maria HÜBNER (EPP)

Reinhard BÜTIKOFER (Greens/EFA)

François ALFONSI (Greens/EFA)

Tonino PICULA (S&D)

Tanja FAJON (S&D)

Javier NART (Renew Europe)

Nicola PROCACCINI (ECR)

Daniela RONDINELLI (NI)

Petras AUŠTREVICIUS (Renew Europe)

Andreas SCHIEDER (S&D)

Laura FERRARA (NI)

Tiziana BEGHIN (NI)

Sabrina PIGNEDOLI (NI)