

SPANISH FRAMEWORK FOR CITIZENS' CONSULTATIONS ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

Conclusions



The Covid-19 pandemic was a real stress test for the European Union. All in all, the EU acted decisively and with solidarity when it was needed, with new European recovery and reconstruction funds financed by pooling debt, and with centralized vaccine procurement. This enabled all European citizens to advance together towards defeating the virus, without discrimination. It was an exercise of European solidarity in action – in contrast with the management of the financial crisis one decade ago.

Now is the time to reflect on what remains to be done for us to be better prepared for future crises, and to safeguard the well-being of Europeans in the decades to come. It is essential for us to rapidly implement some of the lessons learned over these past months, and for us to get ready for the many challenges on the horizon.

This is the spirit driving the Conference on the Future of Europe (COFE). An instrument that aims to listen to citizens, who are not only the beneficiaries but also the protagonists of Europe-building. An ambitious open debate was launched to gather opinions and proposals directly from the public and from representatives of civil society and social partners, together with representatives of European, national, regional, and local institutions, in an unprecedented pan-European exercise.

Spaniards have contributed very actively through the different channels that the Conference created for gathering citizens' opinions, whether through direct participation in the multilingual COFE multilingual digital platform or by organizing events. Another means of participation was

to contribute to the Spanish Framework for Citizens' Consultations on the Future of Europe. This Framework was an initiative promoted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation, open to all of Spain's autonomous communities and to the Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FEMP). In total, 15 autonomous communities and two autonomous cities participated, as well as FEMP. The present document summarizes the main conclusions of the Framework, structured into 18 events held at the regional level and six national events held throughout Spain during the first quarter of 2021. The organization of most of these events included academic institutions, think tanks, and civil society organizations. At the end of each event, the organizers uploaded their conclusions onto the COFE digital platform, making them part of the body of contributions by European citizens to the Conference.

The purpose of this document is to compile all of the ideas put forth during the Framework events. This set of ideas and proposals is especially relevant in the case of Spain, since we will be taking on the Presidency of the Council of the European Union during the second half of 2023. These ideas and proposals are grouped into four major areas of interest: EU citizenship, democracy and participation; social and territorial cohesion; ecological transition and migration; and the European Union in the world.



01

SPANISH FRAMEWORK FOR CITIZENS' CONSULTATIONS ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

The Spanish Framework for Citizens' Consultations was structured through events at the national and regional levels, in close cooperation between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation and the autonomous communities, as well as with civil society groups and individuals.



MARCO NACIONAL DE CONSULTAS CIUDADANAS SOBRE EL FUTURO DE EUROPA



1. **Europa ante el desafío geopolítico del S.XXI.** Con ESADE (Barcelona). 26 de octubre y 16 de noviembre.
2. **Evento binacional con Portugal: Aportación hispano-portuguesa a la Conferencia sobre el Futuro de Europa** (Trujillo). 28 de octubre
3. **Evento binacional con Países Bajos sobre Autonomía Estratégica abierta.** Con Real Instituto Elcano e Instituto Clingendael (Madrid). 2 y 3 de noviembre.
4. **Papel de las regiones en la gobernanza europea** (Sevilla). 6 de noviembre.
5. **Ideas para el futuro de la ciudadanía europea** (Toledo). 10 de noviembre.
6. **Pacto Intergeneracional europeo** (Logroño). 12 noviembre.

NATIONAL FRAMEWORK

01_ Europe and the geopolitical challenges of the 21st century. With the ESADEgeo Center for Global Economy and Geopolitics. Barcelona, 26 October and 16 November.

02_ Bi-national event: Hispano-Portuguese Contribution to the Conference on the Future of Europe. With the Governments of Spain and Portugal and the Regional Government of Extremadura. Trujillo, 28 October.

03_ Bi-national Hispano-Dutch event: Open Strategic Autonomy. With the Royal Elcano Institute and Clingendael, the Netherlands Institute of International Relations. Madrid, 2 and 3 November.

04_ The Role of Regions in European governance. With the Three Cultures Foundation and the Regional Government of Andalusia. Seville, 6 November and online, 16 November.

05_ Ideas for the future of EU citizenship. With the Regional Government of Castilla-La Mancha. Toledo, 10 November.

06_ European intergenerational covenant. With the Reina Sofia Centre for Adolescence and Youth and the Regional Government of La Rioja. Logroño. 13 and 14 November.



MARCO AUTONÓMICO Y LOCAL

01_Extremadura: Relations between the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean, a revamped agenda and a recovery programme within the Sustainable Development Goals. Cuacos de Yuste, 23 July 2021.

02_Valencian Community: Europe and Health: A New Era. Valencia, 27 October.

03_Basque Country and Navarre: Cross-Border Cooperation and the Conference on the Future of Europe. Pamplona, 28 October.

04_Region of Murcia: Transportation and Smart, Sustainable, Resilient Mobility. Cartagena, 29 October.

05_Cantabria: Citizens' Dialogue on Values and the Law. Santander, 2 November.

06_Castilla y León: Innovative Responses to Cross-border Cooperation on Climate Change. Zamora, 3 and 10 November.

07_Canary Islands: The Future of the Outermost Regions in the Future of Europe. Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 5 November.

08_Canary Islands and the Basque Country: Migralantics: Meeting of Atlantic Migrations. Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 10 and 11 November.

09_Balearic Islands and Valencian Community: The Mediterranean and the EU: A Basin for Cohesion. Palma de Mallorca and Valencia, 18 November.

10_Navarre: New European Bauhaus. Pamplona, 19 November.

11_Andalusia: Andalusia, a Neighbourhood Model in the EU. Seville, 24 November.

12_Principality of Asturias and Cantabria: Territorial and Demographic Disparities in the EU: The Challenge of Mountain Regions. Argüeso, 24 November.

13_La Rioja: Youth Social Forum on Gender Violence within the Framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe. Logroño, 24 November.

14_Galicia: All the Opportunities in the Sea: Advancing the Blue Economy. Vigo, 24 November 2021.

• Autonomous Cities of
15_Ceuta and Melilla: A Vision of Europe from North Africa. Ceuta and Melilla, 23-25 November.

16_Balearic Islands: Island Citizenship and the EU. Ibiza, Artá, Ciudadela and Mahón, 8 and 29 October and 24-25 November.

17_Extremadura and Castilla-La Mancha: The Contribution of Spain's Autonomous Communities to the Ecological Future of Europe.

- Citizenry and Sustainable Tourism in Inland Rural Destinations. Garrovillas de Alconétar and Cáceres, 30 November.
- The Energy Transition. Mérida, 29 November.
- Environmental sustainability. Toledo, 2 December.

18_Aragon, Castilla-La Mancha, and Castilla y León: Response to the European Depopulation Challenge. Teruel, Cuenca and Soria, 10 December.



**MARCO
AUTONÓMICO
Y LOCAL
DE CONSULTAS
CIUDADANAS
SOBRE EL FUTURO
DE EUROPA**

- 1. Extremadura:** Las relaciones Unión Europea-América Latina y el Caribe, una agenda renovada y un programa para la recuperación en el marco de los ODS. (Cuacos de Yuste), del 19 al 23 de julio de 2021
- 2. Comunitat Valenciana:** Europa y la salud. Una nueva era (Valencia). 27 de octubre.
- 3. País Vasco y Comunidad Foral de Navarra:** La cooperación transfronteriza ante la Conferencia sobre el Futuro de Europa (Pamplona). 28 de octubre
- 4. Región de Murcia:** El transporte y la movilidad sostenible, inteligente y resiliente (Cartagena). 29 de octubre.
- 5. Cantabria:** Diálogo ciudadano sobre Valores y Derecho. (Santander) 2 de noviembre
- 6. Castilla y León:** Respuestas innovadoras de la cooperación transfronteriza al cambio climático (Zamora). 3 y 10 de noviembre.
- 7. Canarias:** Las Regiones Ultraperiféricas en el futuro de Europa (Las Palmas). 5 de noviembre.
- 8. Canarias y País Vasco:** Migratantes. Foro de Migraciones Atlánticas (Las Palmas). 10 Y 11 de noviembre
- 9. Illes Balears y Comunitat Valenciana:** El Mediterráneo y la UE: una cuenca a cohesionar (Palma y Valencia). 18 de noviembre.
- 10. Comunidad Foral de Navarra:** Nueva Bauhaus europea (Pamplona). 19 de noviembre
- 11. Andalucía:** Andalucía, un modelo de vecindad en la UE (Sevilla). 24 noviembre.
- 12. Principado de Asturias y Cantabria:** Disparidades territoriales y demográficas en la UE: Los Retos de las regiones de montaña (Argüeso). 24 de noviembre.
- 13. La Rioja:** Foro Social de la Juventud sobre Violencia de Género en el marco de la Conferencia sobre el Futuro de Europa (Logroño). 24 de noviembre
- 14. Galicia:** Todas las oportunidades del mar: Avanzando en la Economía Azul. 24 de noviembre de 2021
- 15. Ciudades Autónomas de Ceuta y Melilla:** Una visión de Europa desde el norte de África (Ceuta y Melilla). 23, 24 y 25 de noviembre.
- 16. Illes Balears:** La ciudadanía insular y la UE (Ibiza, Artá, Ciudadela, Mahón). 8 y 29 de octubre y 24-25 de noviembre.
- 17. Extremadura y Castilla-La Mancha:** La contribución de las Comunidades Autónomas en favor del futuro ecológico de Europa - Ciudadanía y turismo sostenible en destinos rurales de interior, (Garrovillas de Alconétar, Cáceres). 30 de noviembre. - La Transición Energética (Mérida). 29 de noviembre. - La sostenibilidad medioambiental (Toledo). 2 de diciembre.
- 18. Aragón, Castilla-La Mancha y Castilla y León:** Respuesta ante el reto europeo de la despoblación (Teruel, Cuenca y Soria). 10 de diciembre.



02

EU CITIZENSHIP, DEMOCRACY AND PARTICIPATION¹

The area of European democracy received the most contributions from Spain on the COFE digital platform. Comments made during Spain's Framework events covered a wide range of issues, noteworthy among them: proposals on strengthening the rights of EU citizens, on promoting EU citizenship through exchange programmes, and on symbolic aspects.

Europeans view the free movement of persons as one of the principal achievements of the integration process. According to the Eurobarometer, the vast majority of EU citizens – with Spain in the lead (88%) – have a positive view of freedom of movement and residence in the European Union.

Nevertheless, in practice, there are still obstacles that citizens consider necessary to remove to ensure the full exercise of these freedoms. Along these lines, many of the proposals received were aimed at cutting red tape, such as supporting initiatives under way to address complications that still persist with regard to the recognition of European certification for certain professions, promoting one-stop shop systems, or accelerating the implementation of a European Digital Identify (eIDAS), which will facilitate the formalities currently required of EU citizens to reside in a Member State different from that of which they are nationals. Lastly, it was proposed to study the standardization of the list of exclusions

1-This section includes events organized by the autonomous communities of Aragon, Castilla-La Mancha, and Castilla y León; the Valencian Community and Balearic Islands; La Rioja; and the national events "The Role of Regions in European Governance" (Seville), "Ideas for the Future of EU Citizenship" (Toledo) and "Conference for the European Intergenerational Covenant".

2-The national framework included a specific event (Toledo, 10 November) on how to develop the concept of citizenship, but this was also a subject addressed in many events held at the regional level.



for access to public employment, so that the list of public positions reserved to nationals could be defined more clearly.

The number of EU citizens who live and work in a Member State different from that of which they are nationals has risen notably in the last decade, reaching 13.3 million people, or 3% of the EU population. Given their contribution to their host societies, and with a view to strengthening European identity, it would be advisable to study extending the right of active and passive suffrage to European citizens in their State of residence to include regional elections, and to simplify the procedures so that citizens would be able to make more use of their right of active and passive suffrage in European and municipal elections. Indeed, at this time the Council is negotiating the proposals of the Commission for “Democracy and Integrity of Elections” package, as part of its European Democracy Action Plan. Two of the legislative proposals refer to the two directives in force on European and municipal

elections, with the aim of facilitating the participation in elections of these mobile EU citizens, reducing possible administrative barriers in order to simplify requirements and encourage voting. For elections to the European Parliament, participants in the events proposed awareness-raising campaigns enabling citizens to see that their vote counts, and to strengthen pan-European public debate. In this regard, the proposal for transnational candidate lists could represent a step in the right direction.

Having EU citizenship means having dual political ties: with one’s Member State, and with the Union. A dual sense of belonging, a dual identity. Spaniards are notable for being a society in which national identity and EU identity are fully compatible. This is why many citizens’ proposals from Spain in this exercise were aimed at strengthening these dual ties in education, culture, and sport. Many participants advocate educating children about this idea from a very young age, incorporating into the curricula specific courses on the EU



and its institutions and the rights associated with EU citizenship. Along these same lines, participants also called for stepping up twinning between schools across the European Union, taking into account territorial and socio-economic inequalities with funding targeting rural areas and schools whose students are especially vulnerable. Moreover, particular interest was expressed in taking maximum advantage of the opportunities offered by the Erasmus+ programme, especially in expanding it beyond universities, as in the Action Plan for Implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, and achieving the European Education Area by 2025. Another initiative that came out of these debates was the proposal for a “Eurosenior” programme, based on previous experiences, to create a corps of volunteers of older people, invited to schools in other countries to talk about issues related to European heritage and historical memory.

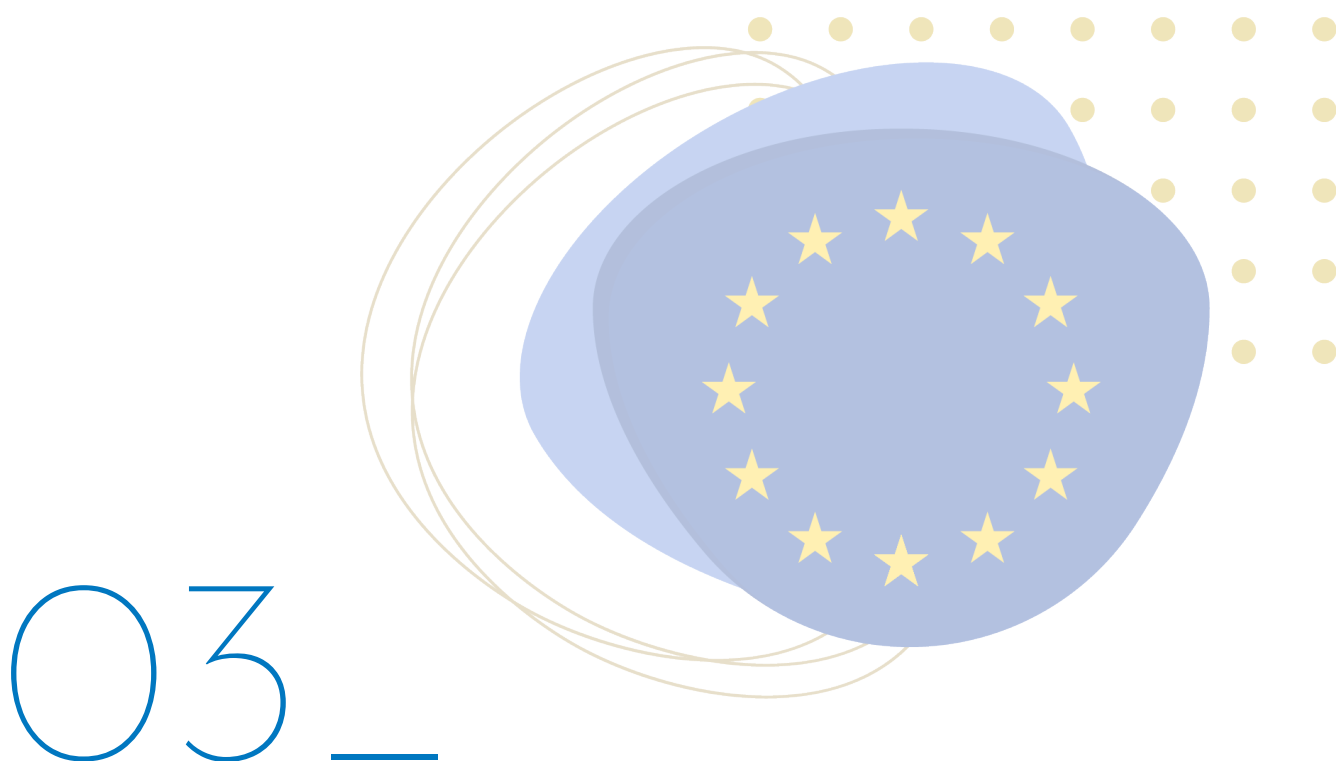
Giving a higher profile to European identity was another proposal heard within this Framework of citizens’ consultations. Suggestions included the use of EU symbols (flag and anthem) together with their national counterparts during international sporting events. The Olympic Games provide another opportunity for this, whether involving the athletes’ uniforms or the medal rankings.

Participants at these events also highlighted the need to further involve Spanish autonomous communities and autonomous cities in designing EU policy, stepping up this aspect of defending and promoting Spain’s interests within the European Union. Many experts and representatives from civil society and academia reflected on possible channels for promoting the autonomous communities’ access to different EU institutions – such as the European Council or the European Court of Justice – or increasing their participation in the legislative process (under the scope of authority of the European Parliament and of the Council). In

this regard, participants highlighted the need to strengthen the role of the Committee of the Regions. Specifically, they called for revising the nature and composition of this body: a reform that should address the real situation of those regions that have legislative authority, giving them greater qualitative weight in the decisions adopted by the Committee.

To this end the possibility was raised that approval of EU regulations regarding territorial cohesion and cross-border cooperation should have a favourable decision from the Committee of the Regions. Furthermore, participants suggested that those European regions with legislative authority should have a more high-profile role within the Committee of the Regions. One of the alternatives for achieving this was to promote greater use of co-official languages in the work of the Committee of the Regions and plenary sessions of the European Parliament, as well as promoting authoritative translations of fundamental EU texts.

With a view to increasing the participation of local entities in EU policy, a proposal was raised for creating a separate Committee of the Cities, representing local authorities, sharing the resources of the Committee of the Regions, following the current model of joint administration and logistics between the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee. Another recurring proposal at these events was to step up the representation of the Autonomous Cities of Ceuta and Melilla at the European level.



SOCIAL AND TERRITORIAL COHESION³

Together with concerns regarding economic recovery, another striking characteristic of the conclusions reached at the different events organized around Spain within the Framework for consultations was the attention paid to other problems, such as the demographic and intergenerational challenge, the special situation of border regions, and the problems affecting certain territories with special characteristics, such as mountainous and island regions. An event was also organized devoted to the outermost regions. Especially relevant here is the importance given to accessibility. Approximately one fifth of EU citizens has some form of disability. There were many calls for a European-wide post-pandemic recovery that is ecological, digital, inclusive and accessible. Interest was also expressed in developing a strategy on the rights of people

with disabilities and making use of the European Pillar of Social Rights and the European Semester to raise awareness and ensure a decent quality of independent life for these people, guaranteeing non-discrimination and the full exercise of their rights.

One of the reflections arising from these events was to consider the problems affecting the development of territories facing severe, permanent disadvantages. Participants raised the need to take into consideration, on a European scale, the problems of different autonomous communities in Spain: especially the outermost regions, islands, and depopulated areas. These aspects require special treatment from the European Union, as established in articles 349 and article 174 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European

3-This section included proposals addressed at the events in Aragon, Castilla-La Mancha, and Castilla y León; Cantabria and Asturias; the Basque Country and Navarre; the Balearic Islands; the Canary Islands; Galicia; and the national events "Conference for the European Intergenerational Covenant" (Logroño), the bi-national Hispano-Portuguese event (Trujillo), and "The Role of Regions in European Governance" (Seville).



Union (TFEU). In the case of territories whose characteristics – such as being outermost regions or islands – make it difficult for them to compete under equal conditions, many participants called for designing and implementing strategies enabling the application of TFEU articles 349 and 174 for these territories, to ensure equal opportunities for all Europeans. Transportation, connectivity, and environmental management are examples of the special attention that island territories need.

The demographic challenge also dominated many events and their resulting ideas. The concentration of the population and economic activity in major urban areas is a global trend that is especially concerning in the European Union and particularly in Spain. Moreover, the EU population will continue ageing, with the median age rising 5 more years by the end of this century, which will have a substantial impact on the dependency rate. By 2050, the EU population is expected to fall to 420 million, which would be only 4.3% of the world population.

At those events involving participants from rural areas, particular emphasis was placed on the need for specific policies addressing the requirements of the rural population. In short, it was concluded that rural depopulation could only be combated by guaranteeing

services that ensure the accessibility of small towns and villages – namely, connectivity, housing, local (basic and leisure) services, and improved transportation systems.

It was also suggested that to maintain the rural population it is important to implement measures that make it easier for entrepreneurs to open businesses in rural areas, thereby strengthening the industrial fabric and the number of potential job vacancies. Another proposal was to create a programme for intergenerational dialogue, offering forums for coexistence and exchange to bring people of different generations closer together, promote the care economy, equip people with more and better skills, improve their well-being, and combat loneliness.

In view of 2022 being the European Year of Youth, the labour market integration of young people – who account for more than 15% of the EU's population – was underscored as another pressing issue. In this regard, the participants highlighted the importance of modernizing and redesigning active policies and committing to innovative policies that facilitate independence, training and access to decent work from the outset of their working lives. These priorities are in line with those of the agenda of the European Pillar of Social Rights, which comprises 20 principles aimed at fostering egalitarian labour markets and protection systems. The policies championed



by the participants of the debates organized by Spain fall under two of the three categories into which the principles of the EU Social Pillar are divided: equal opportunities and access to the labour market, and fair working conditions. Particular importance was attached to the principles of active support to employment, equal opportunities, and secure and adaptable employment. Young people defended, in general, the importance of playing a leading role in building their own futures in the framework of the European Union.

Many of the COFE activities organized by Spain were devoted to the specific problems of cross-border regions, considering as a starting point the need to take into account the perspective of their inhabitants and to seek solutions to the challenges they are facing. Due recognition was given to the importance of these regions, which represent 40% of EU territory and 30% of its population and GDP, meaning the regions have a collective responsibility to make a significant contribution towards Europe-building. In this regard, a number of proposals were aimed at heightening connectivity by strengthening cross-border public transportation and improving digital connections. Other proposals referred to strengthening the role of Eurocities and maximizing the resources included in the EU-4Health programme for a better response to cross-border health, focusing in particular on the allocation of resources for mental health.

In the specific case of the regions of Extremadura (Spain) and Central Portugal and Alentejo (Portugal), the young people who participated in the event held in Trujillo expressed their support for preserving the ways of life of the Euroregion and of conserving the uniqueness of the territories of La Raya, offering proposals especially related to the extensive land use typical of the Spanish *dehesa* and Portuguese *montado* (wooded pasture lands). For their part, the participants

in the events on cross-border cooperation in Navarre and the Basque Country emphasized the importance of standardizing administrative procedures and eliminating obstacles, in addition to seeking local solutions to citizens' day-to-day problems. Those who participated in the discussions held in the Autonomous Cities of Ceuta and Melilla highlighted, as a priority, the opportunity to establish mechanisms to offset the unique structural factors affecting these cities.

In the sphere of cross-border cooperation, the response to climate change was also deemed particularly relevant. In the specific case of the events organized jointly by Castilla y León and the Central and Northern Regions of Portugal in Zamora, it was clearly expressed that, on the one hand, shifting towards a circular economy will entail an unavoidable change in our model of production and consumption, which will be indispensable to achieving our climate goals; and, on the other hand, that it is necessary to adopt actions to minimize the effects of climate change, adapting territories and cities as well as economic activity.

In the case of the outermost regions, the majority of the participants expressed support for the programme of options specifically relating to remoteness and insularity (POSEI), as well as commitment to a greater shift towards the internal market and crop diversification, requesting support for ecological agriculture and for the agri-food sector. The relevance of the specific characteristics of the outermost regions for the Common Agricultural Policy and the EU Cohesion Policy was also highlighted, as were exceptions in the spheres of taxation and State assistance. The implementation of a circular economy system and of measures to mitigate the effects of climate change adapted to the specific factors affecting the outermost regions were matters of particular interest.

04

ECOLOGICAL TRANSITION AND MIGRATION⁴

The fight against climate change and the conservation of the environment and of biodiversity proved to be an indisputable priority of EU citizens, as reflected in the numerous comments and ideas on the subject posted on the digital platform. This is the second most widely discussed issue at the European level and one of the topics that generated the largest number of ideas among the Spanish contributions.

If the current trend continues, the temperature is expected to increase by 2°C by the middle of this century. The associated phenomena, such as extreme weather events, loss of biodiversity, environmental degradation, and diminished food security, could have a major impact on the EU and its Neighbourhood. The EU's commitment to achieving climate neutrality requires that it substantially reduce its use of fossil fuels,

increase its use of renewable energies, and diversify its energy supply. This is crucial to reducing the Union's external vulnerability and to preserving European sovereignty. Just as the climate transition is creating new opportunities for economic growth, it also presents major industrial challenges in terms of equity. For this reason, the event participants considered that the reduction should be achieved at the lowest possible cost, taking into account criteria of solidarity, justice, and the preservation of competitiveness. The main challenge will be how to do this in a just manner, distributing the costs, so as not to harm the most vulnerable groups. This will call for measures at the European level and not just at the national level. To overcome these challenges, the European Green Deal must transform the EU into a modern, competitive economy that makes efficient use of its resources.

⁴-This section includes proposals from the events held in Castilla y León, Ceuta, Galicia, Canary Islands and the Basque Country, Melilla and Navarre.



The European Commission adopted a set of proposals to adapt EU policies on climate, energy, transport and taxation with the aim of reducing net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030 compared with 1990 levels. The EU goals are: to be climate neutral by 2050; to protect human life, animals and plants, reducing pollution; to help companies to become world leaders in clean products and technologies; and to contribute to guaranteeing a just and inclusive transition.

Of particular interest among the broad range of ideas and perspectives shared was the relevance accorded to the circular economy (understood as an economic model that seeks to maximize resources and generate the minimum possible waste) as a response to climate change, and the importance attached to the role of the regions and cities in promoting this model, as well as to the Next Generation EU funds. Participants also stressed the need to promote citizen interest in protecting the natural environment and biodiversity, highlighting the fundamental importance of education and awareness-raising in this regard.

Another of the issues discussed was the need for resilient territories able to guarantee a balance between agriculture and forestry, as well as the need to promote the blue economy, guaranteeing sustainable fisheries and promoting traditional, innovative and emerging fisheries and other maritime activities. Support for industry and the promotion of research were also mentioned. Finally, the participants spoke of the need to renaturalize cities, bringing them closer to nature by following the principles of the New European Bauhaus initiative and mobilizing creative individuals from different disciplines to give shape to the urban spaces of the future, taking into account sustainability, inclusiveness, and aesthetics. With regard to inclusion, the participants also stressed the

need for older people to be involved in the digital transformation.

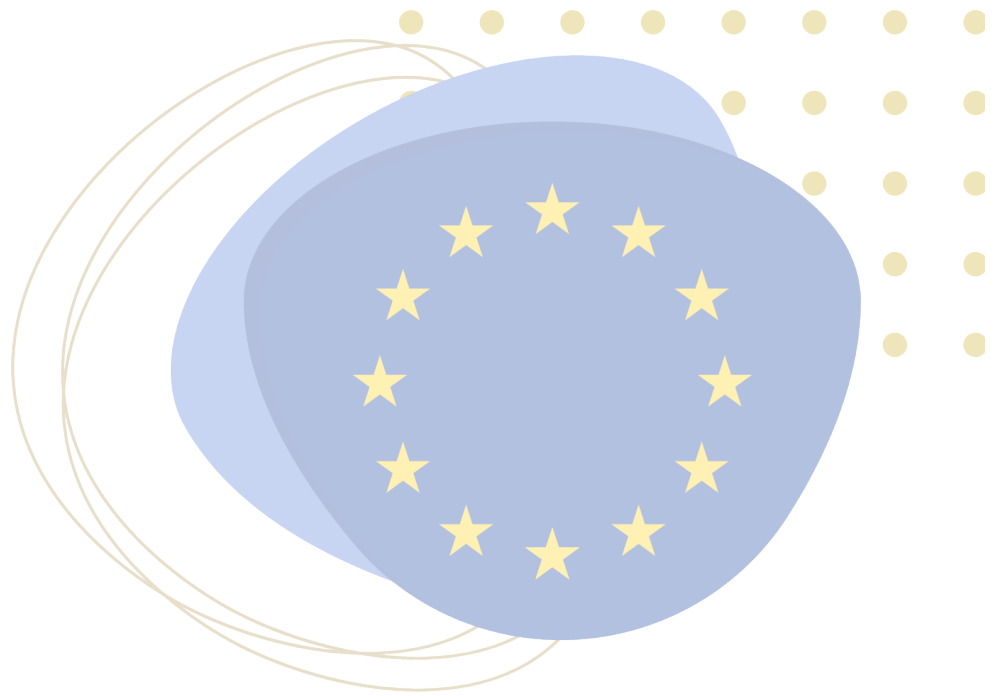
Migration was another cross-cutting issue discussed at many of the COFE debates organized by Spain. The value of Spain's considerable experience in managing immigration with positive results is something that we can and should emphasize.

The participants highlighted the fact that although migration is an EU-wide issue, the Union's external border countries bear the greatest impact from migratory pressure. Therefore, it is vital to strengthen the common migration policy at EU level, to act jointly with both solidarity and responsibility, and respecting international conventions on human rights.

Some participants called for greater collaboration with the countries of origin, in line with the Talent Partnerships proposed by the European Commission. There was substantial agreement that solutions should be sought primarily in the countries of origin of immigration, rather than in the countries of destination. Different paths of action were suggested. The participants considered it essential to combat the underlying causes of migration, addressing demographic challenges and taking climate-displaced people into account. Participants also expressed support for committing to the promotion of legal migration channels as a way of ordering flows and improving assistance to and reception of immigrants at the European level, paying particular attention to unaccompanied minors. The need to strengthen the Common European Asylum System in order to improve the treatment of asylum seekers was also mentioned.

05

THE EU IN THE WORLD⁵



Debate regarding the EU's role in the world, in particular in the context of growing tensions between the major powers, featured heavily in the comments of Spanish and other EU citizens. The lessons learned from managing the pandemic, and more recently the supply-chain crisis, also shaped an agenda on which the concepts of strategic autonomy and crisis preparedness were evoked from different viewpoints. The current global crisis provoked by Russia's aggression against Ukraine underscores the pertinence of the concerns expressed by Spanish citizens regarding the need to strengthen the European Union as a global actor, in particular as regards security on our continent.

When discussing strategic autonomy and

the EU's international role, the participants agreed that, despite its significant regulatory power in the global market, the European Union still does not have the same geopolitical influence as other powers, such as the USA and China. Faced with the prospect of a world that is becoming more inward-looking, many of the experts and other citizens who took part in this exercise agreed that the EU must promote its own strategic autonomy and guarantee the comprehensive defence of its borders, paying particular attention to Ceuta and Melilla, both of which are on the EU's southernmost border. This autonomy should not only be understood in terms of security and defence, but in a broader sense that encompasses energy supply, technological development, and leadership in values, and

⁵This includes the proposals made at the events organized in Andalusia; Ceuta and Melilla; the Valencian Community and Balearic Islands; Extremadura and Castilla-La Mancha; as well as the national event "The European Union in a geopolitical world" (Barcelona) and the bi-national event on open strategic autonomy organized with the Elcano Royal Institute and Clingendael, the Netherlands Institute of International Relations (Madrid).




the fight against the climate crisis, as well as connectivity. In this regard, there was ample consensus that the Union must not limit itself to providing the playing field, setting the rules and acting as arbiter; it must also be a key player in the world economy in order to shape global standards and values. The proposed means of achieving this objective included recommendations on how to ensure that the EU holds strategic positions in the global value chains for certain key products, which would call for a robust industrial policy, taking into account both large companies and SMEs. An alternative solution mentioned during the events was to seek controlled interdependence, rather than independence. This would call for horizontal policies promoting trans-European innovation centres and ecosystems, instead of seeking to “select the winners”.

The military sphere of the EU also featured in the debates, with participants stressing that the EU has an important role to play in helping its Member States to develop high-level capabilities and technologies. The participants also emphasized the importance of EU-NATO relations as regards the EU Strategic Compass and the NATO new Strategic Concept, which is to be adopted at the Madrid Summit in June. Another aspect underscored was the need to strengthen healthcare capacities through the European Health Union, to be better prepared against potential pandemics or health crises.

Several activities focused their debates on priority geographical areas traditionally of

interest to Spain. In this regard, participants discussed the EU Southern Neighbourhood, Africa, and relations with Latin America and the Caribbean. Many of the participants shared the opinion that the European Neighbourhood Policy must also give priority to cooperation with the EU’s Southern neighbours, which would call for resources and ambitious policies in all aspects of the relationship, such as the conservation of the environment, legal channels of immigration, collaboration between universities, support for digitalization and innovation, and the creation of a Mediterranean Erasmus for higher education and vocational students.

At several events, particular emphasis was placed on the values that Europe shares with Ibero-America, as regards both democracy and our conception of human rights, meaning that these regions have particularly compatible outlooks. The possibility of forging relationships based on the defence of common values and interests means that the EU should become more actively involved on this continent, including by supporting regional integration processes in Latin America and the Caribbean. EU investment would be particularly beneficial in terms of promoting connectivity – including beyond physical and logistical connections – promoting the connectivity of knowledge networks, digital networks, and of education systems to bring these economies and societies closer together.



EPILOGUE

AMPLIFYING THE VOICE OF SPANISH CITIZENS AT COFE

What is truly relevant about the Conference on the Future of Europe is the forum it provides for listening to EU citizens. COFE offers an opportunity to rethink and improve the EU as an organization and as a project, with the maximum involvement of its citizens through additional channels to those that guarantee their institutional participation in the Union. This is a unique opportunity to establish a common path for the future, with the EU institutions allowing citizens, for the first time, to directly express their views in the debate on the future of Europe. This bottom-up process for listening to EU citizens – through the digital platform, Citizens' Panels and the Plenary – will conclude in a report endorsed by all participants.

Due to their magnitude, the decisions made in the coming years will be wide-reaching in their impacts. The pandemic accelerated trends that were already on the horizon, and today we are talking more and more about geopolitics, pandemics, trade wars, the demographic challenge, polarization, strategic autonomy, value chains, and

resilience. Russia's aggression against Ukraine has strengthened this trend and demands that we rethink the role of the European Union in a world in flux.

Now is the time to reflect jointly on these future challenges from a European perspective. With this in mind, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation, numerous Spanish autonomous communities and FEMP collaborated to promote the participation of Spaniards in these major European debates. This document is an initiative aimed at maximizing the proposals made by Spanish citizens at COFE. For the voices of Spanish citizens to be heard more clearly in Europe.

Spain will assume the Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2023. At this time, the cycles of EU institutions will be closing, with a view to the European Parliamentary elections in the spring of 2024. It will be an excellent opportunity to follow up on, and to act upon, many of the proposals emerging from COFE.

