



**Brussels, 19 May 2021**

Ref: EDF-YV-21-36

**To:**

Ana Paula Zacarias

Portuguese Secretary of State for EU Affairs, and Co-Chair of the Conference on the Future of Europe

Guy Verhofstadt

MEP and European Parliament's Co-Chair of the Conference on the Future of Europe

Dubravka Šuica

European Commission Vice-President for Democracy and Demography and Co-Chair of the Conference on the Future of Europe

**Subject: Inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities in the Conference on the Future of Europe**

Dear Minister,

Dear MEP,

Dear Commissioner,

I am contacting you on behalf of the European Disability Forum, an umbrella organisation of persons with disabilities that defends the interests of over 100 million persons with disabilities in Europe.

We believe the Conference on the Future of Europe to be a promising opportunity to include the thoughts and ideas of **all citizens** in deciding the future of our Union. This unprecedented democratic exercise must include persons with disabilities, 15% of the European population, as stated in the recently launched European Disability Rights Strategy 2021-2030.

We are ready and eager to contribute to ensure a more inclusive Europe but, to do so, the Conference must be inclusive of persons with disabilities. We therefore request that special attention is paid to **accessibility for persons with disabilities**.

This includes ensuring accessibility measures for all proceedings of the Conference. In fact, we were disappointed to learn that the launch of the Conference on the Future of Europe last May 9<sup>th</sup> was not accessible to persons with disabilities, as it did not provide any sign language interpretation, live subtitling, or audio description of the showed videos.

We do expect that future key events and discussions (namely the Conference plenary meetings, and citizens panels) will include the above mentioned accessibility services.

Furthermore, we would also like to see **proportional representation of persons with disabilities in the Citizens' Panels**. Persons with disabilities taking part in these Citizens Panels should also reflect the diversity among persons with disabilities, and the Conference should ensure the necessary accommodation to facilitate their full participation in the

discussions (e.g. personal assistance, materials in Braille, easy to read, or other accessible formats, guide interpreters for deafblind people).

Lastly, we believe that the **Conference Plenary should include civil society organisations representing the European disability movement.**

We look forward for a Conference that represents Europeans in all their diversity.

We remain at your disposal to support the Executive Board and its secretariat in realising an accessible and inclusive Conference on the Future of Europe.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Y. Vardakastanis', written in a cursive style.

Yannis Vardakastanis  
EDF President