



**Brussels, 13 September 2021**

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**To:**

**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

**Gašper Dovžan**

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

**Subject: Accessibility of the multilingual platform of the Conference on the Future of Europe**

Dear Co-chairs of the Conference on the Future of Europe,

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

We thank you very much for your reply of July 1<sup>st</sup> stating your commitment to ensure that the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) will be inclusive for 100 million persons with disabilities. Likewise, we very much welcomed your request to the Civil Society Convention on the CoFoE to include us among their representatives in the Conference Plenary. Rest assured that we will do our utmost to bring the voices and experiences of persons with disabilities to the upcoming discussions.

We nevertheless remain concerned about the selection of citizens for the Citizens Panels, particularly if the means of reaching out to people will be by random selection through telephone calls. There are many persons with disabilities for whom telephony services are still not accessible, or who live in segregated residential settings. Therefore, as I stated at the inaugural Plenary on June 19<sup>th</sup>, we strongly encourage you to address this issue by actively reaching out to these persons with disabilities, and other marginalised communities.

Additionally, as mentioned in our letter of May 19<sup>th</sup>, to guarantee the participation of persons with disabilities, accessibility is a sine qua non precondition for all the deliberations, proceedings, and materials of the CoFoE.

Given that one of the main tools of the Conference is its multilingual platform, in spirit of our deep commitment to promote it and encourage our constituency to participate, EDF has commissioned and funded a technical audit of the accessibility of this website to a specialised digital accessibility company. We undertook this because persons with disabilities had informed us of the barriers they experienced in using the website.

The report you will find attached to this letter includes a thorough assessment against the current state of the art web accessibility standard, including recommendations on how to solve the accessibility issues that prevent persons with disabilities from using the platform on an equal footing with others. The accessibility audit examines compliance with the same requirements and level of accessibility as the Web Accessibility Directive of 2016.

The findings of the assessment show that persons using assistive technologies such as screen readers, or those who rely on keyboard navigation because of a motor disability cannot use the website. Besides, forms necessary to input content on the platform are not properly designed, some error messages are only conveyed with colour, making it difficult for those with colour blindness, and some buttons do not have enough contrast to be seen by a person with low vision.

We hope you request the CoFoE common secretariat to liaise with the web developers and editors of the multilingual platform to carefully study the report and make the necessary changes to guarantee the accessibility of the website as soon as possible.

We believe the EU institutions should themselves have the accessibility expertise internally so the communications, materials and infrastructures built and used by the EU do not discriminate against persons with disabilities because of inaccessibility. As we can see in this case, this flagship website, designed for citizen engagement, is not accessible, and so results in exclusion of EU citizens from the debate. The company which conducted the accessibility evaluation has also kindly offered to meet with the web IT teams responsible, if deemed necessary.

We at EDF also remain at your disposal to contribute in any way we can to make the Conference a success and an inclusive participatory process for persons with disabilities.

We thank you once again for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,



Yannis Vardakastanis  
EDF President