

# Democratic conventions: for an open method and a European debate

Resolution adopted by the General Assembly of the UEF - France of 7<sup>th</sup> October 2017

Recalling that European federalists put at the heart of their political project (cf. Manifesto of the European Federalists of 1957) the running of a European democratic convention, which would create a European federation, thus rebuilding democracy and sovereignty in Europe.

Considering the speech delivered by Emmanuel Macron, President of the French Republic, at the Paris-Sorbonne University on 26th September 2017, in which he declared his will to organise European democratic conventions in every voluntary EU Member State before the end of summer 2018, in order to rebuild the European project by its citizens.

Underlining the lack of clarity concerning the employed method and the possibility, given or not, to reform the treaties, or even to create a European constitution.

Noting, for now, that the method emerging from the propositions of the French President is leaning towards national conventions according to the model of written consultations in the Member States, the perpetuation of the intergovernmental method, the pre-eminence of the European Council in the orchestration of these conventions, and the absence of a transnational convention at the European level.

The Union of European Federalists - France welcomes **the President of the Republic's will to relaunch the European project and to put the citizens at the heart of this relaunch.** This initiative will allow the citizens to be consulted on the Europe they imagine and foresee. This will make a revision of the treaties possible, since the construction would have been more open and more inclusive to the citizens.

Nevertheless, we are demanding and ambitious regarding the objective of this approach and the considered method. We would like the adopted method to be adapted to the issues of the instauration of such Conventions, for them to include a majority of European citizens and to ensure the respect of democratic requirements. The method should meet minimum conditions:

#### To guarantee the legitimacy of the citizens' representation

It is obvious that the convention process cannot be done with everyone. However, it must at least be based on a legitimate representation of the citizens. It must include local, national and European representatives, from society as a whole, civil society, trade unions and all the elected representatives, and representing territorial diversity. Learning from the experiences of civil society, both on the content and the method, and associate it to the organisation of these conventions.

#### To allow a real debate and the common construction of a project

A method based only on a written concertation is likely to harden the positions between, on the one hand, the criticisms and concerns of numerous citizens concerning today's Europe, and on the other hand, the benefits and interests of the citizens concerning European construction. Such a method does not further neither the debate between the citizens nor the construction of a project, a common hope concerning tomorrow's Europe. Likewise, the considered time is far too short. Following the experience of the Convention on the Future of Europe, we consider that a minimal period of one year appears necessary. The written concertation appears to us more divisive than unifying.

## To guarantee the emergence of a European interest

Given the considered method, the construction of this new political project will only be based on a national prism. The consultation thus organised by each State, without the organisation of a real concertation between the citizens at the European level, cannot bring about a genuine European interest which would consecrate a European political and public space built by the European citizens. The method which is currently considered seems to be a renovation of the intergovernmental approach, which would indeed reinforce the place of the citizen, but would let the monopoly of change and of reform to the Council after this consultation. It would not fill the democratic deficit of political Europe. We cannot have 27 national projects but only one: the European citizens' one. Yet, this method does not exceed the national level.

Consequently, UEF-France asks for thinking about **an open method, furthering a constructive European debate on the long term**, of one year as a minimum. This approach cannot be limited to a giant consultation of the citizens by the Member States' governments.

We thus ask for the organisation of local, regional and cross-border conventions, but above all the creation of **a transnational convention, at the European level, to build a project on a genuine common interest and not on a sum of national interests**. The transnational dimension of this rebuilding by the citizens is a determining element for the success of this initiative.

The European elections of June 2019 could enable the legitimation of the creation of such a European Convention, allowing the newly elected European Parliament to set up a constituent assembly, which would gather local, regional, national and European parliamentarians, representatives of civil society organisations, and citizens involved in the debates. This Convention would be in charge of collecting the results of local and regional conventions in Europe to synthetize and nourish the debate. Digital technologies can also allow to further interactions between the citizens and the members of the Convention, as well as the consultation of the

citizens during the whole process. This project must, above all, be the one of the European citizens as a whole, and not the one of the Member States or national governments. This assembly would be legitimate to propose, as the outcome of these works and debates, a European constitution, whose final adoption would be done by the European citizens.

Finally, if the objective of writing a **European constitution** is not selected, even if it is the only means to create a genuine European sovereignty, we remind that this approach must result, as a minimum, in **the renovation of the existing treaties to correct the institutional and political dysfunctions of the European Union, to build an ever more transparent, political and democratic Europe, concerned about its citizens' implication in the decision process.**

Translated from French by Lorène Weber