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Conference on the Future of Europe - Inaugural Event: statement by Antonio COSTA, Portuguese Prime Minister and President-in-office of the Council of the EU

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Summary:

[Antonio COSTA, Portuguese Prime Minister and President-in-office of the Council of the EU, makes a statement at the inaugural event of the Conference on the Future of Europe, in the European Parliament in Strasbourg. This transcription speech is the result of an automatic process. Check against delivery.](#)

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TIME	DESCRIPTION	DURATION
00:00:06	SOUNDBITE (Original), Annelies BECK, presenter, Our next speaker has just arrived from the city of Porto. Yesterday, he chaired a European Social Summit. Today, we have Antonio Costa. Welcome, prime minister of Portugal and he is here to speak to us about this summit, this invitation to European citizens to be involved in discussions about how we want to organise the Union and how we want to live together in Europe in the future.	00:00:37
00:00:43	SOUNDBITE (Original), Annelies BECK, presenter, It's under Portugal's rotating presidency of the EU that this joint initiative by the European Parliament, European Commission, and the European Council takes flight. It's quite a feat to accomplish to get all these institutions working together with the citizens. Prime Minister Costa, you have the floor.	00:00:26
00:01:09	SOUNDBITE (Original), Antonio COSTA, Portuguese Prime Minister, Thank you very much. President of the French Republic, president of the European Parliament. President of the European Commission. European citizens. It's a pleasure to be here today with President David Sassoli and Ursula von der Leyen in the official opening of the	00:00:45

	Conference on the Future of Europe. The European people across our countries are facing up to the pandemic. There have been horrific consequences, both social and economic.	
00:01:54	SOUNDBITE (Original), Antonio COSTA, Portuguese Prime Minister, This official launch of the conference on the Future of Europe is a message of confidence in the future that we want to convey to all citizens of Europe. Why are we having this conference on the future of Europe? The answer, and it may seem strange to you, was given by one of the great European powers of the 16th century, Luis de Camoes, in one of his most famous poems. He said: times change, desires change, people change, confidence changes. Everything, the whole world, is made up of changes. We always need to develop new qualities.	00:00:47
00:02:41	SOUNDBITE (Original), Antonio COSTA, Portuguese Prime Minister, So let's start with the beginning. Times change, desires change. 71 years now. 71 years have passed since the Schuman Declaration, which we celebrate on the 9th of May as Europe Day. Throughout the 71 years of our will, our desire has changed Europe. For a long time now, we have been more than the six countries who wanted to set up a steel and coal community. The EU has been growing. Our desire has been common to do more.	00:00:40
00:03:21	SOUNDBITE (Original), Antonio COSTA, Portuguese Prime Minister, We've been extending the EU to new accessions and new and more diversity. This is a success story that we can be proud of. Now everything seems clear, obvious, even Brexit seemed irreversible. History is not linear, though, whenever we deepen or expand, the EU has led to difficult choices and meant that we need to find compromise. We needed a lot of persistence and we need to be creative. We didn't always move together, move forward together or at the same time.	00:00:53
00:04:14	SOUNDBITE (Original), Antonio COSTA, Portuguese Prime Minister, Schengen and the euro clearly illustrate, we still haven't fully concluded all of the steps that we've already given, both Schengen and Euro shows quite clearly. We should not forget this. There is a desire to move forward, but we should not allow problems to exist, which can undermine our cohesion, and we need to address the key issues if we want to be successful and we have to be	00:00:52

	<p>successful. We cannot avoid the difficult issues today. There are a range of debates ongoing about what the EU should be.</p>	
00:05:06	<p>SOUNDBITE (Original), Antonio COSTA, Portuguese Prime Minister, These debates are not limited to certain states and moving states, but they are dividing societies in many of our member states. The EU has come forward a long way, but we're still far away from where we need to be. We are, above all, a community of fundamental values. Or are we just an economic space which has added value with this integration? How do we judge these common values? How do we ensure that they are in line with national requirements as well?</p>	00:00:42
00:05:48	<p>SOUNDBITE (Original), Antonio COSTA, Portuguese Prime Minister, How do we link national interests with solidarity, for example? How do we share resources or how do we do this in terms of managing migration? The Conference on the Future of Europe is an opportunity to address these issues, frankly and openly. We don't all think the way that we used to think. New times require new ways of working. I desire changes over time and we want more things.</p>	00:00:39
00:06:27	<p>SOUNDBITE (Original), Antonio COSTA, Portuguese Prime Minister, The Lisbon Treaty was careful. It provided for the necessary flexibility via clauses and also reinforced cooperation mechanisms so that we didn't have to face up a dramatic problems. If there were different opinions, then it allowed for certain people, certain member states, to do more or do things more quickly. We have common values that are not relative, for example, the rule of law, gender equality.</p>	00:00:43
00:07:10	<p>SOUNDBITE (Original), Antonio COSTA, Portuguese Prime Minister, But there are also different matrices which are open to everything we want to see of full participation based on objective criteria that this will allow us to build the future with necessary unity and clearly diversity. This conference, therefore, should focus on all the different desires and roles of all the citizens in Europe and not on negotiations between countries. This is a conference for citizens, by citizens and for citizens.</p>	00:01:00
	<p>SOUNDBITE (Original), Antonio COSTA, Portuguese Prime Minister, The most recent Eurobarometer report is very</p>	

00:08:10	<p>clear. It says that the EU's response to the covid crisis has placed the European Union at the highest level in relation to the amount of trust that people have in it. Well done, Ursula. This time, the success of the EU in looking after its citizens has been very clear. We have seen Europeans did not feel abandoned. They were all considered as equal. We can draw conclusions from this.</p>	00:00:48
00:08:58	<p>SOUNDBITE (Original), Antonio COSTA, Portuguese Prime Minister, Firstly, European citizens recognise the added value of EU action. Secondly, we can say that European citizens want the EU to focus their efforts on a direct response to specific problems that citizens face. Over the past 10 years, a huge number of major topics are continually quoted as sources of concern. Defence of freedom against the terrorist threat, the economic and social situation, and climate change. Migration as well. It is an issue that is of concern to people. It is not surprising, therefore, that over the past 12 months, health has also become a major concern for Europe's citizens.</p>	00:01:04
00:10:02	<p>SOUNDBITE (Original), Antonio COSTA, Portuguese Prime Minister, Another very important point, 9 out of 10 Europeans want a social Europe. If we want Europe to have a future, then Europe needs to build on its strengths and needs to build on the strength of its citizenry. We need more than just certain parts. We need to ensure vast citizen participation. This is a key point. The conference on the future of Europe should focus on the women and men of Europe. What is troubling these people? What is making them dream? This should not be an exercise which is based in Brussels.</p>	00:00:56
00:10:58	<p>SOUNDBITE (Original), Antonio COSTA, Portuguese Prime Minister, It should be member states, regions, municipalities, all local and regional authorities should be involved in promoting the citizen dialogue in a decentralised manner. We need to think of future generations. We should not think of future meetings or the next top jobs or the next treaty. Europe will have no future if our young generations do not have a future in Europe. The very high youth unemployment rate, a segmented labour market. The difficulties for access to housing are creating obstacles for the future of our young generation.</p>	00:00:58
	<p>SOUNDBITE (Original), Antonio COSTA, Portuguese Prime</p>	

00:11:56	Minister, The largest threat to the future of Europe and to the prosperity of Europe is the ageing population, those people who think that immigrants are a threat for a demographic balance are wrong. The demographic threat that we face today is our incapacity to guarantee for young people the possibility of being free to decide what they want to do with their lives. Now, let me go back to Luis de Camoes, the poet and the third verse of his poem.	00:00:46
00:12:42	SOUNDBITE (Original), Antonio COSTA, Portuguese Prime Minister, The whole world is made of change. The European Union is not alone in the world. And must not isolate itself. On the contrary. The EU must change to keep pace with the world. This strategic autonomy that we must pursue must be the autonomy of a Europe open to the world. Diversifying our partners, defending multilateralism, standing up for our values and our standards. We must therefore take the lead in the major causes of humanity in our century.	00:00:50
00:13:32	SOUNDBITE (Original), Antonio COSTA, Portuguese Prime Minister, If Europe wants to be global, it cannot be confined to its continental dimension. The Portuguese presidency will propose that we work within the European Union on a global agenda for the oceans 2050. The oceans are a common heritage of humanity. The oceans are the most important climate regulator. The oceans need urgent protection and the oceans are an immense source of biodiversity and resources. Others have given priority to the moon or to Mars.	00:00:57
00:14:29	SOUNDBITE (Original), Antonio COSTA, Portuguese Prime Minister, But Europe must embrace oceans as it goes and our great mission for the next decade. Because the oceans cover the largest area of our planet, but remain a great unknown. We have used the oceans as a bridge between continents and peoples to trade, to develop knowledge, but we have forgotten the immense territory that remains to discover in the oceans themselves. It's this unknown that we want to discover, to preserve and value. We must say rewarding President Kennedy in 1962. We choose to go to the oceans.	00:01:08
	SOUNDBITE (Original), Antonio COSTA, Portuguese Prime Minister, And now let's move on to the fourth and final verse of this poem: we always need to develop new qualities.	

00:15:37	More than just a common currency, a customs union or a single currency, Europe has been and will remain a community of values as a space with a unique social model. We have protection and provide equality of opportunity for all. This is something that there's no concessions. The future of Europe should be built on the fundamental values of freedom, democracy, human rights, civil rights, economic and social rights.	00:00:47
00:16:24	SOUNDBITE (Original), Antonio COSTA, Portuguese Prime Minister, We will only be able to conserve our identity if we add new qualities. We need to build on the opportunities that we have ahead of us. We started this journey 71 years ago with coal and steel, the basis of the economy at the time. Now we need to begin once again in green and digital, the drivers of recovery plans for the future. I'd like to conclude with a quote from Mario Soares, father of Portuguese democracy and an ardent European and a former MEP in this very chamber.	00:00:47
00:17:11	SOUNDBITE (Original), Antonio COSTA, Portuguese Prime Minister, In 1976 he highlighted or alerted us of the problem, which is very current. Building Europe is not going to be an easy task. There's going to be many obstacles which will be in our way, and some of them will be born from traditions which are linked to collective lives of different peoples. Rethinking Europe and thinking of its future is an ongoing obligation. This should be assumed with humility, faced with the historic importance of the aims, and it should be a task for all Europeans.	00:00:44
00:17:55	SOUNDBITE (Original), Antonio COSTA, Portuguese Prime Minister, That's why rather than looking for change, European citizens need to be those who create this change and build this change. And I'd like to give my final words to the people of Europe, to those of you present here today and the thousands who are connected online. This conference is open. It's open, so that all of you can participate in it.	00:00:36
00:18:31	SOUNDBITE (Original), Antonio COSTA, Portuguese Prime Minister, Come forward with your party's your dreams so that together we can build the future of Europe. Thank you very much.	00:00:39
00:19:10	End	00:00:05

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