

New Pact for Europe - Frequently Asked Questions

What is the aim of the New Pact for Europe project?

The goal is to promote a Europe-wide debate that will generate new thinking about the future of the European Union, gather ideas on how best to address the many internal and external challenges facing Europe and help to close the widening gap between Member States and even within EU countries over the EU's future. The project aims to develop realistic reform proposals to shore up an EU hit by economic, political and social turbulence as well as global challenges in the form of a 'New Pact for Europe'.

What do you intend to do with the results?

A group of top opinion formers from different EU member states will draft a report laying down different potential strategic options for Europe's future, which will then be discussed at national and EU level. The outcome of these debates will then be used to draft a 'New Pact for Europe', with the aim of feeding the ideas generated by the project into the work of the new European Parliament and new leadership in the European Commission and European Council that will take office in 2014 after the European elections.

How can you ensure your proposals won't be ignored by the policy-makers?

The aim of the project is to provide concrete, realistic ideas to feed into the ongoing debate on how best to address the many challenges facing Europe; contribute to the EU institutions' work on developing effective responses to those challenges; and help restore the public's faith in the EU. While the project will obviously be just one of many inputs into this debate, the unique added value of the proposed pact is that it will be based on an objective analysis of the various strategic options open to the EU at this critical juncture, and combine input from national policy-makers and stakeholders with ideas gathered from ordinary members of the public - a diverse and randomly-selected group - and from eminent experts and leading European thinkers.

What are the chances of any of its final proposals being implemented?

If the proposals are realistic and demonstrably in the interests of the member states and their citizens, there is no reason why they should not be put into practice. That is why the next few months will see intensive discussions across the member states and at all levels before the project presents its findings and recommendations.

Can this exercise really result in new thinking and ideas, or is the outcome pre-ordained, with a built-in pro-European bias?

Nothing has been 'pre-cooked' and there are no taboos. That is precisely why the project began with an objective and rigorous analysis of the state of the EU, the many challenges facing Europe and the various strategic options open to the Union to address those challenges. There were 'defenders' of each of these strategic options in the Reflection Group and in the Advisory Group, ensuring that all of them were given equal consideration. This process – and the national debates that will take place in the coming weeks and months – has been designed expressly to avoid the repetition of well-known positions by encouraging 'out of the box' thinking. The involvement of ordinary members of the public in these debates is also designed to 'earth' the discussions in the practical realities of life 'on the ground' and generate fresh ideas on how best to move forward.

Why was abolishing the EU not among the options examined by the Reflection Group?

The project looked at all the options for moving forward, including a scaled-back European Union, but started from the premise that we need to make the EU work better rather than abolishing it, as this was not regarded by any of the Reflection Group or Advisory Group members as a realistic option in today's globalised world. However, participants in the national debates will be able to indicate if this is their preferred option by rejecting all those that have been put on the table in the Reflection Group's report.

Was this project inspired by the euro-zone crisis or does it reflect belief that there is a deeper malaise at the heart of the European integration project?

Concern about the European Union's direction pre-dates the euro-zone crisis, but the economic situation has galvanised those calling for change and obviously provided a starting point for the current discussion. We need to learn the lessons of the crisis and it has underlined the need for a wide-ranging public debate to generate new thinking and fresh ideas to respond to the many challenges we face and bridge the widening gaps within and between member states over the EU's future. However, this project seeks to go beyond a narrow focus on how best to emerge from the crisis: Europe needs a long-term vision of where it wants to go and how to get there, and that is what the 'New Pact for Europe' aims to provide.

How can ordinary members of the public really contribute to this debate when many have little or no understanding of how the EU works?

The public do not need to understand the intricacies of the EU's complex decision-making process to contribute new thinking and fresh ideas to the debate – indeed, they are freer to do so because they are not constrained by procedural and institutional issues. The European Union exists to serve its citizens and no solution to the many challenges it currently faces can be effective if they are excluded from the process.