
CONFERENCE ON EU'S FUTURE DERAILED BY LEADERSHIP FIGHT

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It is the big idea to ask EU citizens how the bloc should be reshaped, but despite Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's enthusiasm to hit the start button, a behind-the-scenes contest over who should be in charge threatens to upset her plans.

Von der Leyen said Thursday that the Conference on the Future of Europe, is "almost ready to start" □ months after its planned debut in spring. It was difficult to get the conference started because of [the coronavirus pandemic], but it is absolutely necessary and we are eager to get it started, she said.

All three EU institutions have agreed (more or less) on the scope and general outline of the conference, but an ongoing battle to find a charismatic EU figure to preside over the debates has delayed efforts to get the event off the ground. Officials say the Council's rebuke of Guy Verhofstadt, the European Parliament's candidate to lead the conference, has kicked off a leadership contest, with new names, including Alexander Stubb, a former Finnish prime minister, emerging as contenders for the prime position.

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