



## Reuniting European Citizens Around EU Values Policy Proposals Panel 1

### Executive Summary

The founding principles of the EU - human dignity, freedom, democracy, rule of law, equality, and respect for human rights - are broadly uncontested and endangered by populist parties and extremist movements. Also, the current challenges put the EU under pressure, which is why the identity of the European project must be strengthened.

In order to reunite the EU citizens around European values and to keep living and defining these values jointly, we have elaborated different policy proposals on several broader topics: the promotion of opportunities for multicultural diversity, sensitive and empowering education, bottom-up initiatives open to all EU citizens and ages, the construction of a platform strong enough to counter fake news and extremist propaganda, and lastly, an innovative initiative to strengthen the narrative and communication of the EU. All of the above aims at shaping the EU as a role model for every generation.

Especially during the current situation, it is important to stand together as Europeans and protect and promote our core values and help them evolve in the future.

### Problem Statement

*“The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.”*

Article 2 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) sets the main European values. Yet, these values are in crisis because we live in a time where more and more people prefer their own bubbles and fixed parameters over open exchange and having to face different perspectives and the complexity of life. This phenomenon goes hand in hand with the development of an increasingly value-driven society (“Wertegesellschaft”) (Erpenbeck & Sauter, 2020, S. 1), which invites fake-news, propaganda, populism, and even war to spread in Europe.

This development is the more dangerous as we are witnessing a steep decline of the common European values, such as those described in Article 2 of the Treaty on the European Union. If we as European citizens in charge of our common future don't take action to counteract the current corrosive tendencies, the European Community soon will just be the faint remembrance of a once idyllic union of peaceful neighbours we failed to defend when we still had time to do so. This is why we won't take up the fight



against the ongoing shift towards a value society, but instead use the power of this general reorientation to unite the EU population around our core values.

We want to state to you as the audience, that the following proposals are general ideas from European Youth which should be further developed. We ask you kindly to consider our proposals as initial ideas which should be implemented with the help of your respective institution or due to your personal mandate whenever it is possible.

### Policy Proposals

European values are perceived as far from a large part of people. Legislation and actual policies are far away and not practically experienced, while events organised by a local association could help people to feel more involved. They could feel more involved in a European context and concretely experience these values. In order to reunite European citizens under the EU values and to fight the fear of the unknown which has spread all over the countries, we should let people know and discover other cultures.

1. People hear about Europe every day, but they don't feel as a part of Europe, considering it a virtual concept or a political one, far from their daily life. Everyone who has experienced an international experience knows that this is the best way for understanding the connection between our countries and communities and for overcoming the national dimension and embracing the European one. But this has been limited only to people who can afford it and are able to visit other European countries. **We suggest that the EU introduces a fund for enhancing interactions between citizens for helping people to concretely experience European context and values** in their own country or abroad. This fund should be decentralised and easy to access for all associations that share the European values in all of the Erasmus+ countries. The usage of this fund by these associations should be aimed at organising international activities open to everyone such as educational, training or social events, civic engagement projects or any other activities aimed at enhancing the sense of belonging in Europe. European associations such as ESN, BEST, EESTEC or minor associations etc. can join this fund and propose their project to be approved.

In order to strengthen the European values among EU citizens, it is highly important to engage with the citizens' education as early as possible. In our early years, all of us are already on the way to becoming fully fledged EU citizens. Our values and choices as citizens are shaped by our many interactions with other people, especially teachers. Therefore, we propose that:





2. **The EU encourages further multicultural activities for the education of young children.** European children should be able to participate in cross-border initiatives like the European Voluntary Service (additional fund) or DiscoverEU. Exposure to direct benefits and diverse people would foster the integration of European values for our youth. Early contact with a foreign language is proven to greatly benefit the development of many skills. Possible implementations may include : trips and visits to other countries and European institutions ; mobility at young ages (before 17) ; promoting European involvement by creating panels or conferences for the youth. We call for additional funding and lowering the age required to take part in EU youth initiatives.
3. **Promote a European Teacher Exchange Year.** Teachers also have a key role in transmitting values and thus, in the deconstruction or perpetuation of biases and heterostereotypes. Mutual understanding in plural societies is based on the capacity to endure ambiguity as well as a multiplicity of perspectives as a resource, not a danger or disturbance. These competences could be learned and trained everyday in day-care-centres, pre-schools and school classrooms provided that teachers are given the opportunity to experience multiculturalism as well through incentives such as a European Teacher Exchange Year, additional mobility and working in tandem with teachers from another country.

The EU needs to live up to its own values as a role model in order to reunite European citizens around them. According to the Eurobarometer 2015, 58% of Europeans think that the migration policy of the EU is one of the biggest issues in Europe, being a reason for the greatest insecurities in the continent. We therefore suggest that:

4. **The EU should change its migration policy and reconsider the Dublin Regulation.** The values of the EU - especially human rights - also need to be implemented in its migration policy. Refugees should be able to choose which country they want to seek asylum in - especially when they have family in Europe - and not be forced to stay in the first country they enter. Solidarity between EU Member States should be enhanced when it comes to the proportional relocation of all migrants. If human rights are disregarded in migration issues, **a new conditionality mechanism should be implemented**, leading to consequences for the countries that do not respect fundamental rights.

European values must also be reflected in the European economy. The EU taxonomy offers better transparency in the field of climate change by making European companies, as well as participants on the financial market disclose their level of conformity with certain environmental objectives. The taxonomy should not only reflect environmental issues but also EU values.

5. **Expanding the EU taxonomy to European Values:** We recommend including measurable data for European Values, especially equality (gender, minorities and other marginalised groups),





human rights (especially in the production chain) and democracy/plurality (especially concerning unions) into the taxonomy. Considering the current timeline and evolution of the EU Taxonomy, we propose a starting date in 2025 for one dimension, adding another dimension each year. A **platform for CSR reports with a ranking** would also act as a vehicle for the population to see the reports as well as as an incentive for the companies themselves.

In order to reunite European citizens under the EU values and to try and reestablish the feeling that citizens can influence the decisions made on a central level through bottom up initiatives, we propose, on the basis of Citizen's Panels created for the Conference of Europe and the idea of the deliberative democracy:

- 6. Local Panels about EU issues should be created in each Member State.** The goal is to discuss topics and strengthen the relations between people and EU politics within a deliberative democracy model. Based on the topic to discuss, each panel invites experts to shed light on the topic, facilitate the collaboration within the group and assist in draft preparation. The Panels consist of a proportional amount of people depending on the population of the country and are randomly chosen. If a person participates in one panel, then they have less chances to participate in the next one, in order to have more voices heard. For all panels spots are reserved for invited as well as for minority groups randomly selected too. Local members of the European Parliament are invited to attend as well. The panels should take place ideally once a year in each Member State. After a Panel-Meeting, the document will be voted for/approved by the participants. Every panel creates a single page document with a policy recommendation. All documents will be combined to one proposal, which will then be sent to the European Parliament. The final document should be discussed in the European Parliament in due time.

Fake news and extremist propaganda is not a new problem, but the contemporary possibility to spread information in a targeted yet massive and effective way has opened the door to the creation of convincing extremist propaganda with harmful consequences to the general public. It is important to take action to help the society shape a strong criteria to choose reliable sources for them to build their line of thought. In the most difficult times for Europe like today, we believe that it is vital to create and support media resources dedicated to countering aggressive narratives, fake news and extremist propaganda. We therefore propose to EU to take action via:

- 7. The development and establishment of a state-of-the-art digital interactive platform** that





serves as a fact check instrument where people can double check the information they are being exposed to. In addition to this, it is important that the EU engages in the **regularisation of the exposure to manipulated information and click baits**. A first step to achieve this could be the annexation of reliable sources in posts dealing with sensitive information, like the addition of the World Health Organisation link in every post that mentioned COVID-19. Needless to say, freedom of speech and respect of diversity in opinions should be a pillar in European values. Yet it is essential for the opinions to be linked to verifiable sources and facts.

To promote the European values stated in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) in an increasingly value-driven society, better communication with the European population is necessary. In order to achieve this goal, it is crucial to further develop the European communications platform. Hence, we propose establishing EUCPRA - EU Communications & PR Agency and increasing subsidies for media coverage of the EU.

8. **Establishing EUCPRA - EU Communications & PR Agency:** The EU is composed of various institutions that are established in accordance with EU legislation. Each of those institutions, be it the Commission, the European Central Bank, or the Parliament have their own communications staff. While having independent communications platforms that are focused on the activities performed by the institutions is important, the vast majority of the EU population are not familiar with the complex systems of those institutions. EUCPRA - EU Communications & PR Agency would integrate different communications strategies from institutions and also communicate it with the EU population in its entirety. This organisation should be led by an experienced communicator and form a voice for the EU as a whole. The possible competences of the Agency may be the following:

- **Launching an initiative #IamEU.** #IamEU should be an initiative covering social media campaigns, public talks, festivals, etc. led by EUCPRA - EU Communications & PR Agency. It will target the EU population as a whole and will be aimed to accumulate the thoughts and posts of Europeans and how people resonate with the EU values.
- **An European programme streaming on public broadcastings and social media.** In order to unite the European population around the EU values, it is important to establish a venue where people can express their opinions and ask questions to politicians. For each program there should be European Politicians from each country and people from the different member states. The program could take place regularly in different countries of Europe. The topics of the programme could either be voted by the European



population or the ongoing political decisions which will be made in the upcoming weeks / current news. Politicians are expected to answer questions in an open and direct way.

- **Promoting the EU values during the European Week of Regions and Cities (#EURegionsWeek) through multicultural events.** The events that should take place during the European Week might be cultural activities, information booths, festivals, exhibitions and food events.

9. **Increasing subsidies for independent media coverage of the EU:** The European Parliament invited media outlets to apply for funding totalling €8.8 million for 2020 and 2021 for "impartial and factual information" about the European Parliament. At the same time, the Member States have their own models for media subsidies which mostly only apply to media based in their own territory. The EU institutions should replicate this media subsidy model for pan-european media outlets that report on EU issues and values.

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## Panel 2: How can the European Union become more resilient to cyber attacks?

### **CYBERSECURITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A channel for European Students' Cyber Resilience**

#### **Executive Summary**

With higher education institutions in the European Union (EU) becoming increasingly digitally advanced, lives of the European Youth appears even more intertwined with and dependent on digital networks as constituents of the infrastructure, safety, and quality of European education and research.

The European Youth's Digital Sovereignty needs to be founded on the resilience of all connected services and products. This policy paper addresses the current vulnerability of higher education institutions (HEIs) in eight recommendations aiming at defining basic necessities, promoting cooperation within and between public and private sector, and empowering students in increasing their cybersecurity knowledge and skills.

#### **Problem Statement**

The third objective of the European strategy for Universities states: "*Empower universities as key actors of change in the twin green and digital transition*"<sup>1</sup>. Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, the citizens of the EU are becoming more and more dependent on digital tools. The Higher Education Sector is a good example of that tendency, as the sudden introduction of online classes as well as other remote teaching and learning methodologies led to an increase in the online presence of both administrative and academic information. Overall, the accelerated pace of digitalization has to be read as a signal to bring social attention to the question of cybersecurity, also at a European level.

Cybersecurity serves as one of the main challenges of the century and Higher Education Institutions are no exception: students, staff and academics find themselves confronted with unprecedented challenges of cybersecurity. However, these actors are often not aware of the degree to which keeping a safe cybersphere is important. Higher Education Institutions own critical data and research material which needs to be protected so that the European Higher Education Sector can stay relevant within an increasingly competitive global environment. Ensuring Academic freedom, while protecting research data on delicate topics like the human genome, becomes a challenge. Therefore, the question is: "**How can the EU become more resilient to cyber attacks?**"

This proposal recommends answers to this question by focusing on what the European Institutions could do for HEIs regarding improvement of cybersecurity. By implementing the Policy Recommendations below, the EU will position itself internationally, raise awareness about a pressing issue among its younger citizens and overall become more cyber-resilient.

#### **Policy Proposals**

##### **1. Implement baseline requirements on cybersecurity for HEIs**

The implementation and continuous development of EU baseline requirements on the subject of cybersecurity are a precondition to the resilience of HEIs. Security enhancing methods (e.g. open source and multi-factor authentication) are to be introduced to the educational sector. We call upon the ENISA to develop these standards, involving HEIs' expertise. Retention of ERC subsidies needs to be subject to compliance because receiving funding can not come without the obligation of proper cybersecurity.

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<sup>1</sup> [Higher education: deeper transnational cooperation \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu)

## **2. Support cybersecurity solutions through European funding**

The EU should maximise access-to-finance for cybersecurity research. The European Cybersecurity Competence Centre, together with the Network of National Coordination Centres, make strategic investment decisions and pool resources from the EU budgets. These two actors should play a key role in delivering the ambitious cybersecurity objectives of the Digital Europe Programme and Horizon Europe programmes. This can be done through coordination among stakeholders and any other interested parties, by sharing mutual goals regarding expertise and capacities among research and industrial communities.

## **3. Establish cyber-resilience internal structure within HEIs**

We recommend the EU to provide HEIs with ENISA-certified Cybersecurity Office teams consisting of at least: Chief Security Officer, Security Manager, Security Analysts, Security Engineers, Applications Security Administrators. We recommend the Cybersecurity Office team to work closely with ENISA in terms of research and prevention of cyber attacks.

## **4. Improve cybersecurity cooperation between HEIs and alliances**

Research and Development innovative exchange programmes and tools are needed to collect opportunities from different countries and to involve students in economic outputs. For this purpose, the implementation of common databases could link HEIs and alliances in order to share scientific data. The creation of cybersecurity-related criteria, as proposed in Recommendation 1, during future EUI funding calls would encourage further inter-HEI cooperation, including information exchange, counterpart meetings, joint bargaining in front of software providers, within alliances in ensuring their institutions' own cyber-resilience.

## **5. Support cooperation between companies and HEIs**

To foster collaboration in the cybersecurity field, the EU should emphasise public-private partnerships by implementing new funding and open innovation strategies both at the local and national level. The Commission should incentivise HEIs, students and companies via grants or scholarships to plan challenge-based, interdisciplinary activities around the topic of cybersecurity. The aim is to increase professional formation among students and support them in following a career and academic interest in cybersecurity.

## **6. Support balanced growth of human capital**

The EU should tackle the issue of female underrepresentation in the field of cybersecurity. As women account for only one fourth of cybersecurity professionals<sup>2</sup>, increasing this number may constitute a viable solution for the growing overall shortage of workers in this field. We recommend the creation of an international network focusing on education and training of women in STEM fields.

## **7. Raise awareness among students**

The EU has the duty to ensure that every student has a right to the protection of their data throughout their studies and therefore the EU must guarantee that all students are aware of the cybersecurity challenges. Thus, we ask the EU to institute an annual award of the European HEI of Cybersecurity, to the HEI that has most proactively increased the awareness of cybersecurity and empowered young people. The criteria will be created in collaboration with ENISA awareness programs<sup>3</sup>, with one of the criteria being that the HEI offers every student a free access to secure antivirus software.

## **8. Support activities within HEIs that foster youth participation**

We advise the EU to create integrated multidisciplinary committees to promote student engagement, generate informational content and implement awareness-related activities. This engagement should be focused on universities and its student councils in order to create locally addressed policies and follow upon the harmonisation of European cooperation best practices.

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<sup>2</sup> Women in Cybersecurity Report (2018) [ISC2-Women-in-Cybersecurity-Report.ashx](https://www.enisa.europa.eu/topics/cybersecurity-education)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.enisa.europa.eu/topics/cybersecurity-education>

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**Panel 3**  
**European Health Union:**  
**A collective and integrated response to shared health problems**

**Executive Summary**

The differences in health strategies in the past few years have highlighted how integration and cooperation between European countries are crucial to overcome global health problems. This proposal will address how different areas of health (e.g. mental health, digital health, healthcare workers, health costs and research) can benefit from a collective response by the further development of the European Health Union with a focus on the harmonization of public health policies.

**Problem Statement**

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for a European Health Union (EHU). The mental and physical health of millions of citizens has been affected by the pandemic. This reveals the importance of taking care of overall health to have properly working societies that are able to withstand global problems in crisis times. Therefore, it is needed that the European Union takes immediate action on the topic of health, as there is not a single person on the planet not affected by it now. Moreover, it has not only limited the health of the population but also the countries' economies. Although most European member countries offer almost universal coverage for a fundamental range of health services, there are still disparities in health care coverage.

Considering the topic of health within the EU, the countries are sovereign and therefore able to create and implement their own laws. Hence, the chosen strategies in approaching the pandemic and other health-related topics (i.e., digital health, costs, policies and regulations, healthcare workers, scientific research) varies widely within the European borders. Sovereignty also applies to many other areas, in which through the years, the members of the EU have converged and integrated their strategies, generating more efficient systems and further benefits for the European citizens. That is why EHU should follow next.

**Policy Proposals**

1. Enabling a legal, ethical, technological and financial framework for the integrity, the quality, and the standardization of health data across European countries; for a better interoperability of health systems as well as a more efficient collaboration on joint innovative projects.
2. Reducing the gap between basic sciences, health research, and healthcare sector by funding multidisciplinary projects and teams, further developing joint



curricula and establishing guidelines for the harmonization of the work practices of the three stakeholders.

3. Promote health literacy among European citizens, and countries in order to prevent misunderstandings and clinical errors, providing the foundation of knowledge needed to create a unified and coherent set of digital tools, to be used by the European Health Union (e.g. European Health Insurance Card).
4. Increase the support in risk management within the member states during health crisis and include binding elements in EU policy regarding the topic of health. This could lead to more harmonized strategies within Europe, potentially expanding to a global level.
5. Improve access to mental health care, considering the different needs and vulnerabilities of the populations, especially young people who were one of the most affected by the pandemic.
6. Improve working conditions for healthcare workers to make the job more attractive and to make them stay in the job longer without mental health problems, so that the healthcare workers shortage will be eased and the patients get the best care there is.
7. Centralize medical products (e.g. vaccine, medications) purchase and negotiation with biopharmaceutical companies.
8. Develop health hubs in highly populated Europe regions and near borders that specialize in cutting-edge treatments and/or rare diseases to progress faster in healthcare innovation. These hubs would be able to treat any European citizen in the same conditions.
9. Provide effective access to critical health services, ensure sufficient health insurance coverage for the entire population, as well as proper geographic distribution of health services across different regions in each country.
10. The European Health Union must ensure the confidentiality of European citizens' health data by creating a secure platform coordinated between the Member States and their government services, which would only be accessible by doctors within the Member States.

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## A greener CAP

### Executive Summary

This Policy Proposal presents a more self-demanding CAP. New strategies are proposed to make CAP greener. We introduce them in a way that does not subordinate Environmental goals to Internal Market ones. However, the new CAP will defy the myth of inefficiency by being mindful of impact driven initiatives. A nonconformist CAP is possible, and we must implement it in earnest.

### Problem Statement

The new CAP is the greenest CAP in the records, and the European Commission claims 40% of total expenditure supports climate action. But is it enough? According to the European Environmental Agency, planned reforms will only reduce emissions by 5% on 2005 levels. This violates the binding annual targets set by the Effort Sharing Regulation for 2030. European Environmental Researchers have questioned expenditure claims with more than 3.600 of them signing a position paper calling for more action in setting biodiversity targets.

The issue of Greening CAP exists in an Institutional and Legal context. Firstly Article 11 TFEU and art 37 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights set forth the commitment of the EU to look for the protection of the environment and sustainability of development in all its policies. CAP is a shared competence between the EU and the MS and Codecision is the default legal procedure to shape it.

The CAP organises its funding along policy cycles. The new CAP policy cycle (2023-2027) is opening as a political agreement was agreed upon by the EP on the 23rd of November 2021. Now that the Commission is reviewing the national CAP plans the EP has still a last asset to influence the CAP by issuing non-binding own reports. This is especially the case in a new CAP budget that gives room for MS discretion. A Green CAP requires compromise, and the EP should be vocal alerting the Commission that MS national interest is not necessarily the environment's interest.

The definition of Sustainability should be subject to peer review and consensus by independent experts, including Commission Research Centres. We acknowledge on each criterion and region this definition must be re-examined.

## Policy Proposals





Proposal 1. Actively phasing out pesticide and chemical fertiliser use in the EU over the next three CAP cycles. Besides emitting GHGs, these products deteriorate the mineral and biological soil composition, increasing our dependence on them yearly. The EU should strive to align with its own foreign policy, as it supports and funds the initiatives of Bhutan, a country that plans to raise and import only pesticide and fertiliser free produced agrifoods. We propose a longer transition period than the rest of our proposals, because we recognise the potential impacts on production and prices. Dividing these products in three categories according to their pollution impact, with each category banned in a cycle. We recommend MS to make campaigns against agriproducts being discarded on aesthetic grounds to counterbalance the resulting partial decline in production.

Proposal 2: Adoption of Common Accreditation Framework to encourage young farmers under the age of 40 to drive environmentally friendly farming practices. The basis of this proposal lies in mandating vocational farming training in rotation along crop cycles in the Member States (MS). Young people under rural development should be targets of a scheme emphasising sustainable farming practices, fostering research and development, and encouraging age, gender-balanced participation. We want to streamline processes to give young farmers tools and skills with an EU wide recognition to make them drivers of sustainable farming practices.

Proposal 3. Remove the hectare criterion as the guiding principle for the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund basic income support. CAP should move to universal minimum farmer income, with bonus criteria to increase payment allocation. Farmers should get economic incentives to implement sustainable measurements: reintroduce natural pollinators and pest controllers, regenerative crops, and seasonal crops, reducing pesticides and fertilisers. This encourages farming more fertile soils, repurposing the rest through greening direct payments. Reduced land utilisation in agriculture will impact biodiversity positively and be useful for protecting farmers from small MS, who tend to have smaller farming units and increased land-use competition.

Proposal 4. Insert mirror clauses in the new EU-Third Countries/Regional Blocks free trade agreements. This would mean that trading partners wishing to export their agricultural products to Europe must comply with its phytosanitary and environmental standards. Given the strong constraints on EU farmers, Europe cannot accept to put trade above environmental and consumer protection. We support the French presidency of the Council initiative to introduce said clauses to push for global climate goals and incentivize other countries to follow. This guarantees an equal playing field before EU consumers, who should access agriproducts of comparable quality.

Proposal 5. Enhance crop diversification and cultivation of endemic plants. This topic is of growing concern for the Commission, which funds projects like Diverfarming to research diversification through crop rotation and intercultures, which are tied to environmental resilience and to market flexibility. It stops biodiversity loss, soil degradation and water pollution. Farmers are held back by risk aversion and short tenancies halting investment recovery. Thereby, we request the Commission to issue a Code of Conduct. This Code would be signed by lessors who commit to lengthening contracts for crop diversification, to insurance givers to issue reports predicting weather events affecting crops and to demand the Commission that approval of National CAP Plans pends on providing dispute resolution channels.



Proposal 6. Take a step forward in EU Ecolabelling assessment criteria. We propose labelling based on the measurement of the carbon footprint in each consumer product, with the aim to include additional measurements once this system is well-established. Implementation will be phased in, with major food retailers bearing the primary cost of certifying their suppliers. A method like the Nutriscore colours is recommended as consumers need to identify the impact of what they buy easily. A reduced demand for carbon intensive products (meat and dairy) is a social necessity. In fact, if we are to move towards sustainable development, we need policies that tackle consumption trends and consider how they drive environmental degradation in less affluent regions.

Proposal 7. Accelerate the transition to circular food systems. First, we propose promoting regenerative agricultural practices based on principles including but not limited to agroforestry and permaculture, based on local environments. Second, identify food waste sources at all stages of the supply chain and advocate regulations to create a less wasteful system. The Garot law in France is an example, introducing an obligation for supermarkets to redistribute unsold goods. Third, capture the value of food waste by transforming it into valuable materials and products and improving current composting systems. A specific emphasis should be placed on implementing these principles in urban contexts. This will improve the resilience of food systems in face of the increased pressure faced by ecosystems due to climate-induced hazards.

Proposal 8. Promote internship schemes in farming. Establish a practical information network on farming and help agricultural businesses to achieve concrete projects (short or long term) by the mobility of students and young people who are interested in farm life across different farms. The young people with no prior knowledge on farming are the main group of concern, with this we are hoping more of them would be inclined to go to the farms since picking a future in farming is a bigger step to take without a general idea of the farmlife. By recognising a validation of competences on farming skills, we could help the youth to start their own farming business. We would like to promote the WWOOF initiative on a European scale. This would widen the network for farmers, exchange of practical information, promote young farmers, and peer-based education. This could also benefit traditional farmers to take more sustainability into account in their production. There would be criterias for farmers to enter the network (paperwork, security checks, social checks, etc.). The certification for the interns will be delivered after a report of the skills acquired.

Proposal 9. A great number of CAP policies require close monitoring of environmental factors. Due to the scarcity of available data for an efficient decision-making process for future policies we propose a new, European-wide monitoring programme. The aim is threefold: i) to evaluate if the conditionality for receiving CAP funding is met; ii) to check if sustainable criteria are implemented (for example, sustainable eco-schemes); iii) to evaluate if measurements proposed in CAP have a significantly positive impact on ecosystems, biodiversity, water and air quality, soil nutrients... We need new environmental indicators and proxies (general and particularised to the variety of agricultural and ecological contexts of the EU). The implementation could be centralised and carried out by a European Institution, or the funding could be derived from the MS Agriculture ministries.

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**Sustainable development or degrowth - What economic model can the EU adopt for tomorrow's world and how can it be durably settled?**

**Executive Summary**

This policy proposal introduces solutions to shape the future economic system of the European Union. It takes social, economic and environmental factors into consideration to mold a sustainable, efficient and resilient Europe.

**Problem Statement**

When thinking about the future economic system, a lot of questions . The already implemented regulations are rather vague and intangible. Designing the economic system of the future is a huge challenge which needs to be addressed, because this is the actual frame in which states, companies and people interact. It is of most importance to find a sustainable system that is able to react and adapt on certain issues, for example climate change. It is vital to European Union is heading towards a more united and resilient future. We need to overcome the fossil and the exploitation of the nature. new economic system to be implemented be circular, sustainable and resilient framework must consider environmental boundaries and social minimum standards, as for e.g. Prof. Raworth suggests in her idea "Doughnut Economy". Bringing key actors together towards better . Green economy accounts for the environment and the value of natural assets, in planning and decision making, and focuses on the quality and sources of economic growth - as opposed to today's focus on the growth number only.

**Policy Proposals**

1. Member states have different environmental, economic and social characteristics. Therefore, **each EU Member States should acquire the highest possible specialization by region in activities and sectors where it has sustainable comparative advantages. Higher education and research will play a key role in this specialization process.**
2. According to the European Commission only 38% of waste is recycled in the EU. We recommend **transitioning to a circular economy, including a circular bioeconomy, by giving incentives to companies to develop policies based on this model. Actions to be taken include reduction of waste of resources in the production process, emphasizing the utilization of renewable resources, plant and animal by-products, biodegradable materials and. raising awareness of local communities about the advantages of the circular economy.**
3. 21 EU Member States are coastal and European citizens have an inseparable connection with the sea, a source for prosperity and sustainable development. We recommend the **adoption of a new productive development model based on the Sustainable Blue Economy (centered around sustainable use of ocean resources) which considers the three pillars of sustainability: environmental, social, and economic.**
4. Free allowances under the Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) will be phased out from 2026 when the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) becomes operational, and eliminated by 2035. The free allowances hinder a fast achievement of net-zero emissions. **Phasing out of free allowances should be**



**accelerated and eliminated by 2030. The funds gathered from carbon imports should be used for the green transition in Europe.**

**5. The Global South is likely to experience significant shocks from the implementation of a CBAM and decarbonization efforts. The EU needs to support the Global South in decarbonization, as climate change is a global challenge. Dialogue with the Global South should be increased, to better understand funding needs. Setting up a separate EU fund to be included in the next Multiannual Financial Framework will help finance the transition of developing countries. Enhanced communication with partners (IMF, World Bank) must help identifying additional sources of funding for the Global South.**

**6. Forest biodiversity is important for providing clean air, capturing carbon dioxide emissions and preventing soil erosion and climate change. Deforestation is a serious threat both within the EU and in the rest of the world, with the EU being responsible for the destruction of 10% of the forests worldwide (WWF). Member States should adopt baselines and national targets for reforestation based on their own situation. This could be integrated in the current ETS (for within the EU) and a CBAM (for imports), refunding allowances costs for firms that actively participate in reforestation projects/that reduce their deforestation activities subject to submitted proof yearly.**

**7. Since 70% of European citizens live in cities, and this generates 23% of all the greenhouse gas emissions from transport, investments in cycling projects are essential so that urban mobility becomes more sustainable, smart and healthy. A ban on car access to city centers should be imposed, and investments in bike infrastructure should be supported by the EU, creating safer bike lanes, cycle paths and bike-only streets.**

**8. The European Environment Agency shows that trains emit 28.39g of CO<sub>2</sub> per kilometer per passenger, making it the least carbon-intensive mode of transportation, compared with 244.09g for planes. Train travel is under-utilized due to difficulties of cross-border travel, train infrastructure and high cost. A common subsidized transport ticket system based on single tickets across providers and borders should be established which ensures fair prices and adequate cooperation/protection in the case of transport incidents, such as canceled or delayed trains. The implementation of standardized long-distance train infrastructure should be prioritized when new or cross-border connections are established. A marketing campaign should underline the clear benefit for both the environment and the consumer of traveling by rail instead of flying.**

**9. The fossil assets of the 11 big euro banks represent 95% of their total equity in 2021, it is therefore urgent to settle key steps to reach net-zero emissions. By 2030, fossil assets (assets related to the exploration, development, transportation and use of coal, oil and gas) must not represent more than 50% of a bank's portfolio, with penalties in the case of infringements.**

**10. The price of energy has skyrocketed and the transition from fossil fuels to sustainable ways to produce energy is costly. The generation of energy by the citizens contributes to the democratization of the energy production process. A system where energy consumers (farmers, households, small and medium enterprises) can become renewable energy producers should be implemented, through funding and regulation.**

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**Panel 6**  
**Transcending Together –**  
**Towards e-Democracy for the Future of Europe**

**Executive Summary**

With the rise of digitalisation and the impact of COVID-19, the European Union faced many challenges in transforming its institutions into accessible and inclusive digital platforms for all Europeans. Therefore, the main focus is to ensure that everyone across Europe is aware of their rights, digital tools, and its benefits. The following document provides recommendations in the fields of online education and voting, multi-linguistic representation and information accessibility, among others. It answers the question of how the digital transformation could enhance democratic participation.

**Problem Statement**

We are in the middle of a digital transformation: Not only have human activities been subject to change in the digital age, but even entire political systems experience a great shift in regard to their governance structure, the politics of information distribution, and citizens' right to participate.

However, while some EU citizens have the socioeconomic advantage to live in a well-developed country with suitable infrastructure or a well-funded educational system in which access and use of digital tools is no obstacle, other regions of Europe still struggle to include all people in the digital space. The European digitalisation process reveals an increasing trend towards a deep social component, risking further societal cleavage across the European Union.

It is, therefore, the responsibility and challenge of political leaders to ensure the equal and safe participation in the digital spaces for all European citizens. We must benefit from the effects of the increasing digitization in our society, making them accessible and perceptible for everyone. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the value of digital alternatives of communication and participation. It is necessary that the EU invests in policies for the digital transformation and makes sure that nobody falls behind the level of participation that prevailed before the pandemic. Digital tools enable citizens to virtually get in contact with supporters and opponents alike, fostering rich and fruitful discussions about the future of democracy.

Consequently, we have identified 10 key areas in which the EU should take action and propose 10 policy recommendations of how to achieve an inclusive digital democracy for the future.





### Policy Proposals

#### 1. Spotlight lenses - Enhancing visibility of existing mechanisms and inventing new ones

Despite the existence of the European Citizens' Initiative and the European Parliament petitions, many citizens are unaware of these mechanisms. We need to promote them at a national, regional, and local level, and take advantage of the public salience of the European elections to do so.

#### 2. Our opinion matters – Implementing Permanent Citizen Councils

Participatory democracy mechanisms must be strengthened. This should be done by making them permanent and more impactful. On one hand, by institutionalising the citizens' panels and implementing them on the national level. On the other hand, by maintaining and reforming the multilingual digital platform of the CoFoE after 9th May 2022.

#### 3. Vote from home – Online voting as an option, not a solution

Secure, transparent, and straightforward online voting through a digital platform is a necessity. It should be accessible from anywhere and equal for everyone.

#### 4. The EU has my back – EU's principles for safer digital spaces

All activities organised by the European institutions must ensure that every participant feels safe in digital spaces. Mechanisms to prevent and combat hate speech and discrimination should be put in place.

#### 5. Popular democracy – Implementing an unbiased digital platform

The EU should work actively towards making the existing digital platforms more inclusive, engaging, and comprehensive for everyone. Young people must have easy access to transparent information and equal participation opportunities in order to develop themselves into conscious, active, and critical citizens.

#### 6. Include to integrate – Enhancing inclusivity by expanding options

In order to ensure that every citizen has equal access to information, an 'easy language' option on all EU and governmental websites, mindful colour coding for the visibly impaired, adjustable letter size and audio accessible content should be implemented.

#### 7. Language Umbrella – European multilingual cohesion





Even though the official European documents are already translated into the 24 EU languages, this excludes nationally-recognised minority languages of countries within the Union as well as those spoken in the potential EU member states. Thus, we strongly encourage to ease access to official publications in all these languages in order to improve the cohesion in Europe.

#### 8. Educate to excel – Enhancing critical digital literacy among all EU citizens

Digital literacy enhancement needs to happen so that all citizens, regardless of their socioeconomic, educational status and age, are equipped with the tools and skills to participate in the digital spaces. Creating additional community services and transforming the already existing ones could greatly contribute to this cause.

#### 9. Rise up, get involved and see the world – Enriching early education with European mobility and the development of democratic competencies

The EU should focus on fostering exchange programs in primary and secondary education levels in order to increase knowledge about the EU and its values. Pre-academic exchange programs are a core value to build and solidify a European identity in younger generations.

#### 10. Culture on the go – Using augmented reality to educate

Strong digital connections bring Europe closer together. Using augmented reality offers everyone a chance to visit important European landmarks and discover the diversity of European cultures with the assistance of your own mobile device. Therefore, we encourage European Union representation offices at the national level to use augmented reality to bring the European Union closer to citizens.





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### Panel 7

**Social media: opportunities and threats - How can the EU regulate digital platforms without limiting freedom of speech and the free exchange of thoughts?**

### Executive Summary

Brief and concrete summary of the Policy Proposal

### Problem Statement

The rapid and ever-evolving growth of social media has brought with it challenges of hate speech and privacy concerns, and legislative intervention appears to be the best way forward to address the protection of individual rights by the companies governing the social media landscape. The interaction between individual social media platforms' voluntary governing principles and the wider framework of international human rights and data privacy legislation requires further development.

Hate speech and hate crime have seen a sharp rise across Europe and have become a particularly serious and worrying phenomenon – offline and online. It is important to highlight that according to the Council of Europe (Recommendation n.º R (97) 20), *hate speech covers all forms of expressions that spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, or other forms of hatred based on intolerance.*

Everyone should have the right to benefit from public measures to promote the responsible use of cyberspace and to protect against all forms of discrimination and crime. Therefore, it may be necessary to sanction or even prevent all forms of expression which spread, incite or justify hatred based on intolerance. According to the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech of 2019, *“addressing hate speech does not mean limiting or prohibiting freedom of speech. It means keeping hate speech from escalating into something more dangerous, particularly incitement to discrimination, hostility and violence, which is prohibited under international law.”*

**Freedom of expression**, which includes the **freedom of speech**, is a fundamental



right, defined by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as *the right to hold opinion without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers*. Whilst **freedom of thought** is an absolute civil right that cannot be restricted, freedom of expression can be restricted as a means to prevent harm to other fundamental rights, for example dignity and integrity. Article 19, para. 3, of the ICCPR (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights) requires limits on freedom of expression to satisfy the three-part test of legality, legitimacy, and necessity and proportionality.

The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights ( UNGPs), endorsed by the UN Human Rights Council in 2011, establish a voluntary framework for the human rights responsibilities of private businesses. The European Union has already developed a framework to regulate this issue, for instance the “Council Framework Decision on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law”. The European Commission has also proposed two legislative initiatives to upgrade rules governing digital services in the EU: the Digital Services Act (DSA) and the Digital Markets Act (DMA). However, this is clearly not enough to provide adequate answers to this complex issue. In the light of this problem we propose some measures to the EU to tackle this challenge balancing and protecting those fundamental rights.

Furthermore, amidst increasing consumer concerns relating to online privacy, the GDPR and other legislation is increasingly important in providing individuals full control over their personal data and centralizing the regulatory environment by corresponding to EU regulations. Such regulation is critical to ensure the protection of personal information of EU residents and citizens whilst using social media.

## Policy Proposals

### Transparency of Communication and Code

1. There should be higher standards of data transparency. Thus, we propose that personal consumer data held by social media companies should be available to the users of the platforms, with the information provided in clear language about the permissions, reasons, and period of use of the data, and an option to download and modify those. Furthermore, proprietary data relating to internal





social media procedures should be made available to external researchers for auditing purposes.

2. Users should have the option of providing recommendations as to the operation of social media platforms to regulatory bodies, particularly around moderation and curation.
3. Every social media platform should be subjected to transparency reporting according to a Europe-wide regulatory framework. The companies should also have an obligation to be transparent about any government requests for customer data.

#### **Content Moderation**

4. We propose a European Regulatory Agency that would be an independent body. It will carry out moderation of content published on social media platforms to ensure the correct balance between freedom of expression and other fundamental rights.
5. We propose the creation of a framework for social media platforms to establish protocols for monitoring hate speech and fake news, within a reasonable period of time after notification. Trending content will be verified at different levels - initially by automated machine systems and further by human moderators.

#### **Fundamental Rights on the Internet**

6. We propose a European Charter on Human Rights in the Digital Era, inspired by the Portuguese Charter on this topic, as a way to harmonize the legislation amongst the Member States.
7. We propose the inclusion of hate speech (see the aforementioned definition) in the European Union Crimes List, which would make it easier for Member States to hold a person who committed this crime responsible even if this crime affects a person in a different Member State, creating a united front in combating crime.



### Protective and Educative Measures

8. We propose that social media platforms make available up-to-date resources about mental health issues, and guidance as to safe practices. The platforms should publish original content on the duties and responsibilities that come with the freedom of speech, with the aim to educate their users on information consumption and promotion.
9. We propose the creation of an independent organization that will be in charge of the protection of children's participation online, that will draw on the experience of child rights organizations. This will ensure that children's freedom of expression is not only encouraged but protected by procedures that set the standard of ethics.
10. Labeling should be given priority over de-platformisation. In case of demonetisation, there must be a specific system to appeal this decision.

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**Panel 8**  
**EU Foreign Policy Integration**  
**The Road to a Collective and Assertive Union**

### Executive Summary

The proposal urges the EU to adopt a more united and assertive foreign policy. It aims to overcome organisational hurdles and simplify internal processes. It encourages the incorporation of national defence capabilities into the Common Security and Defence Policy, as well as a novel approach to non-military insecurities. To reinforce open strategic autonomy, it proposes a comprehensive, continent-wide strategy on energy independence. It also suggests a broad strategy for stronger neighbourly cooperation and the protection of human rights, through the inclusion of Human Rights as a core pillar for the single market and EU migration policy.

### Problem Statement

On the global stage, the EU has historically struggled to transition from a spectator to an actor, particularly its Common Foreign and Security Policy has faced significant shortcomings. However, the EU's swift and coordinated response to aggression by the Russian government and its humanitarian and military support to Ukraine, opens a window of opportunity to broader foreign policy adjustment, heralded by High Representative Josep Borrell as the Union's "geopolitical awakening". Challenges to a more united and assertive foreign policy remain. On an institutional level, the often-observed deadlock in reaching consensus on key decisions as well as obstacles to communication and cooperation between national governments need to be addressed. The EU also faces key-challenges in fostering the strength of the single market, implementing the European Green Deal to achieve climate neutrality and diversifying energy sources. The EU needs to set an example for a human rights-based migration policy as well as the promotion of the rule of law, human rights, democracy and non-discrimination within its borders, in its neighbourhood and across the globe.

### Policy Proposals

We, the students of Panel 8 of the European Student Assembly:

1. Recommend that the European Council, pursuant to Article 48.7 TEU, votes on the **adoption of Qualified Majority Voting (QMV)** and the **Ordinary Legislative Procedure (OLP)** wherever possible. We encourage the elimination of special legislative procedures





in upcoming treaty amendments and the complete application of the OLP and QMV to Council procedures.

2. Recommend that the **Foreign Affairs Council increases the frequency of meetings** to twice a month, maintaining a more updated and informed conversation on foreign policy, trade, security and defence.
3. Propose that, pursuant to Articles 42.3 TEU & 2.4 TFEU, the **European Corps (Eurocorps) becomes an official branch of the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO)**, and therefore a part of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).
4. Encourage the EU to view **non-military insecurities**, such as but not limited to water, climate and corruption **as part of its aspiration to be a security-provider**, and to collectively find multi-stakeholder solutions for emerging soft insecurities.
5. Support the European Commission's proposals on sustainability such as increasing investments in renewables, improved insulation technologies and the **inclusion of nuclear energy in the green taxonomy**. This aims to encourage open strategic autonomy and the **diversification of energy sources**, making the EU less dependent on external energy supplies.
6. Recommend to include **Human Rights as the fourth pillar** of the European Commission's proposal on the **legal framework for the participation of non-EU countries in the single market**, in addition to labour, security, and environmental standards, as defined by the Action 7.
7. Recommend the EU endorses the **engagement with its neighbouring countries on a civil society level** following environmental, social and governance criteria. It should be achieved by fostering educational exchange, promoting small and medium enterprises growth and renewing infrastructures with direct investments.
8. Recommend **empowerment of the Fundamental Rights Officer** with the authority to directly access relevant data from national and European authorities and the power to issue binding resolutions to Frontex promoting fundamental rights. Further, the European Parliament should compel Frontex to be fully transparent in its operations and measures.
9. Propose and support, in reaction to current exceptional events, the **immediate recognition of Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova as candidates for membership of the EU** and swift engagement in accession negotiations with them. Furthermore, we urge the EU to support these countries in the thorough implementation of the Copenhagen criteria.

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**Panel 9**  
**Environmentally displaced persons in the era of climate change**

**Executive Summary**

All people are entitled to certain human rights which extend to protection against climate crisis induced harms. Taking the responsibility of the EU for the current Climate Crisis into account, we urge the EU to work towards greater policy coherence at the EU level in addressing the challenge of just and effective climate transition, and counter climate crisis induced migration. We emphasize mitigation, address the root causes of climate-induced migration and propose more concrete legally binding steps to adapt to climate change beginning in 2022.

**Problem Statement**

Forced migration due to the climate crisis is imminent. The Global Climate Risk Index, which analyzes the extent to which regions have been affected by the climate crisis, has found that climate change has a broad and exigent impact worldwide. Though high income countries are affected, the 2019 report showed that the poorest countries are the most vulnerable to escalating climate harms due to lower coping capacity and resources to rebuild. Meanwhile the OECD has shown that developed countries have produced 79% of global emissions from 1850 to 2011, meaning much of the adaptation and mitigation work lies with them. Women, especially, are affected by natural disasters and their aftermath, due to socioeconomic status and patterns. Women and girls are disadvantaged by their dominant societal roles, limited education and financial resources leaving them with fewer options to relocate to avoid the effects of natural disasters.

Though other regions of the world are more affected by changes in temperature, the EU also is experiencing the effects of the climate crisis. According to the IDMC (Internal Displacement Monitoring Center), 37,700 people within the EU were forcefully displaced because of climate disasters. While a report by the world bank estimates that 200 million people will be displaced in the coming three decades. The EU will not only be affected by climate harms, but also by those who will seek safety within its borders. Households in Kiribati, Tuvalu and Nauru are already experiencing climate related hazards and state reports claim that these environmental stressors are already inducing migration. Currently, more than 1.14 million people are facing starvation due to drought. The clearest examples, however, are in the Pacific Islands. The sea level is rising at a rate of 12 millimeters per year in the western Pacific and has already



submerged eight islands. Two more are on the brink of disappearing, prompting a wave of migration to larger countries.

The EU must act in advance, or risk missing the chance to decrease the scale of this oncoming crisis. As such we present these recommendations:

1. *Recommends* the European Union to recognize the term ‘environmentally displaced person’ legally defined as: “a person being displaced in order to escape the effects of environmental disaster, climate change and unsustainable exploitations of natural resources”.

2. *Urges* the EU to encourage legal recognition of ‘environmentally displaced persons’ in human rights laws in State and inter-State levels to:

- a) provide humanitarian protection independently from national laws or state discretion,
- b) grant persons eligible for humanitarian protection equal benefits as those receiving subsidiary protection in recognition of the rights to life, to existence with dignity, to safe, healthy and clean environment, and ensure principles of freedom and self-determination of every human being are respected.
- c) increase its humanitarian protection and aid budget as well as using its adaptation financing program for vulnerable countries (similar to the United Nations),

3. *Fully supports* further mitigation actions of the European Union such as implementation of the Climate Law (Regulation (EU) 2021/1119) under the European Green Deal on preventing the possibility of forced migration due to climate change through:

- a) using its existing adaptation infrastructure to provide protection and safeguard measures by incorporating the construction of resilient infrastructure and increasing opportunities for paid employment (i.e. habitat rehabilitation, alternative labor options during droughts) whilst creating sustainable development policies tailored to each region that deeply involve communities, turning into long term employment that leads to economic growth,
- b) ensure following a gender-sensitive approach to those defined under the first clause as the climate crisis is a deeply gendered phenomenon and will have consequences for potential displacement,
- c) ending the subsidizes of extraction of fossil energy sources and increasing its financial incentives for renewable energies,
- d) increasing financial investments to explore alternative eco-friendly energy sources, within the private sector,



- e) Creating a unified labelling systems and reduced advertisement for environmentally damaging products,
- f) increasing the current carbon tax at a legally binding European minimum level, taking 116 euro Mt/Co2 as a steering point like Sweden incorporates.

4. *Calls upon* the European Union institutions to increase public awareness of, accessibility to and education on climate change, international cooperation and environmentally displaced persons through:

- a) an increased budget on research as well as information dissemination, such as the educational material available School education gateway, eTwinning and EPALÉ.
- b) an education module for member states based on EU-led research, the involvement of stakeholders (e.g. civil society, private sector, local authorities, native communities) for a just and effective climate transition.

5. *Urges* the categorization of climate events, the risk they present to people and climate endangered areas which should be carried out by an independent, inter-state EU body/agency to differentiate between rapid-onset climate events and slow-onset climate events with an approach based on science and defined reliable indicators, as in the Global Climate Risk Index 2020.

6. *Recommends* redefining or expanding the existing framework (e.g. the Temporary Protection Directive (2001/55/EC)) to cover temporary displacement to cover environmentally displaced persons. Potential application cases should include mass influx of environmentally displaced people in case of a rapid-onset or potential mass-casualty-event, *taking the The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 into consideration for Early warning systems; Provide training on post-disaster recovery; Support capacity building on climate change and migration* into consideration.

7. *Emphasizes* the need for a concrete strategy to address the issue of environmental migration on longer term:

A centralized system should be created to treat the applications of environmentally displaced persons which can utilize existing legal processes under the supervision of already existing authorities (e.g. the European Union Agency for Asylum). The goal is to ensure a fair allocation of resources and beneficiaries among the member states. Different strategies should be taken into account concerning rehabilitation, resettlement as well as the importance of integration of environmentally displaced persons and consider beforehand a smoothly permanent integration of displaced persons that may not have the



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possibility to return to their homeland or do not have the possibility to find durable protection in another State.

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### Panel 10

## How to build future-oriented, digitalized, and yet inclusive higher education systems across the European Union?

### **Executive Summary**

COVID-19 has disrupted education and training in an unprecedented way. The pandemic and the subsequent move to remote and later blended learning have been a watershed event for Member States' education systems. According to a public consultation launched by the European Commission, 60% of respondents had not used distance and online learning before the crisis and 95% consider that the COVID-19 pandemic marks a turning point for how technology is used in education and training.

According to the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union (art. 165), the EU has the task of contributing to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their actions. Its power is therefore very limited, Education remaining a competency of the member States. The EU has nevertheless developed a higher education policy based on two major instruments.

- On one hand, the Erasmus+ programme was created 30 years ago and progressively extended to support learning mobilities and projects in the field of education, training, youth and sport. The budget of the Erasmus+ programme has considerably increased, reaching €26.2 billion euros for the period 2021-2027.
- On the other hand, the Bologna process has led to the creation of the European Higher Education Area which focuses on the mutual recognition of qualifications and diplomas. The Lisbon Convention was co-signed by the Council of Europe and UNESCO and signed by 55 countries. Although it is not an EU instrument, the process of Bologna plays a major role in facilitating student and staff mobility.

In 2019, the European Commission has launched the European Universities initiative as part of the development of a European Education Area by 2025. Up to now, 41 alliances including 289 higher education institutions are taking part in the initiative. They are expected to test new levels of cooperation, developing inter-university campuses, allowing seamless mobility of staff and students, and creating multidisciplinary challenge-based activities at the crossroads of education, research, innovation and society. In the context of the European Education Area,





the European Commission and the European Council have issued a series of documents that lay the stress on several priorities: quality of education and skills recognition, social inclusion, environmental sustainability in education, and digitalisation.

### **Problem Statement**

Education and research are precious common goods to be nurtured. Because universities are at the forefront of innovation and host an increasing number of students and European citizens, they should be the leaders of global change in our common future. According to the European Union's motto, "United in diversity", universities have to tackle challenges both at the global and local levels. Their capacity to shape the future and fulfill their intellectual and social role in European societies will depend on their ability to cooperate in common goals as well as to ensure diverse and pluralistic programmes.

Panel 10's topic encouraged many discussions and debates on the Higher Education systems across Europe. Distance learning options were available for citizens to avail off with the minorities choosing to utilize that avenue. Throughout the global pandemic, higher education shifted to an online format which raises the debate of "how should higher education be delivered in the future?". What we found from this shift is that people's mental health has seriously regressed with higher levels of isolation and loneliness from the rest of the student population. Alongside that, the quality of education that is being delivered online is exceptionally of a lower quality in comparison to the traditional delivery of in class learning.

The pandemic has highlighted the inequalities that existed amongst our student communities. Many students used to utilize the hardware and software of their respective campuses as well as the premises. Right now their access is limited to that and naturally, demand for online access to those tools arised. To ensure parity of esteem and reduce discrimination amongst the population, every student should be equipped with the resources and infrastructure, to fully participate and thrive within their studies. In terms of accommodation, this topic raised many debates with the drive for digitalization for higher education going forward. With higher education now being accessible to everyone, the background of students (i.e students from diverse demographic/socioeconomic backgrounds) differs from the norm. Not every student will have access to their family's home. Their only avenue for a fixed abode is to compete with the rental markets and against the many other members of society. There has been an absence of leadership in tackling this fundamental issue, which not only affects students but also the community of citizens across Europe. As of now, there has been no coherent EU response in mitigating these issues with housing in Europe.



## Policy Proposals

### 1. Digital education quality assurance

Inequality within European countries in regards to digital education quality is creating a lot of differences within universities. All students do not have the same amount of access to digital equipment, internet and training. Nowadays, without educational training students are unable to connect and develop professionally in all educational levels. Through COVID-19 all students have been affected, and the structures and quality of their education has decreased. Furthermore, with funding that focuses on maintaining, developing and ensuring digitalization of education it is highly necessary. Funding would provide help to universities that are unable to provide students with the adequate digital equipment. Thus, making sure all students have access to the internet, laptop and cloud platform enabling studying online digitally. By financing and focusing on digital training and education, it is possible to create guidelines for training and offer a label for the universities' alliances that meet the basic requirements.

Moreover, this is part of the European Commission policy on digital strategy : Digital Education Plan. It focuses on fostering the development of a high performing digital education ecosystem including infrastructure, connectivity and digital equipment.

### 2. Networking is the future

Digital mobilization has become one of the biggest trends throughout the past years. A significant part of it is networking. Students are pushed to network and connect with companies, labor unions in order to be present in changes within industries and communities. A mutual project should be created to connect students to students, that allows them to connect through different stages of their studies: start-during - post graduation. It should be accessible for everyone, meaning access to the correct equipment and platforms are needed.

In addition to connecting students to students, it is also necessary to connect students to influence within their future industries in order to promote innovation, creativity and a next generation point of view. Although digitized education should still try to promote and enhance 'tangible' ,practical learning in a pioneering way. Under the umbrella of European Universities ,theoretical education could be connected with industry and real workplaces through closer collaboration of companies or organizations and universities such as orientation weeks in which representatives of big organizations could virtually guide students through the facilities or laboratories of their companies or discuss significant matters and exchange their know-how on an Inter European level.





### **3. Digital training for faculty members**

Promoting and implementing different initiatives to improve the digital skills of students and teachers. Supporting disadvantaged students with free courses, and also teachers in taking not only digital classes and improving their teaching skills with the help of technology, but also courses that will make their teaching more inclusive.

Thus, Improving resources for teachers according to the present digital era , providing suitable training and appropriate teaching tools that provide faculty members with upgraded teaching methods that may enhance and significantly help improve the quality of teaching and learning. This can be done by making sure teachers have a minimal requirement of the digital appliances being used, and providing them with innovative ways of using different online platforms, softwares and applications. Furthermore, improving student engagement during online classes, lack of interest and attention.

Moreover, by working on the above mentioned proposals the quality of studies and teaching will increase. This would be the perfect opportunity to change the way digitalization is viewed and prevent educational issues that occurred during the pandemic. The future is digital, and funding and programs are needed in order to move forward, and to make sure everyone is part of the movement.

### **4. Accommodation - making our educational system accessible.**

Across Europe, the provision of accommodation is not fitting the demand of what our society needs. Students compete with other members of society, often immigrants and people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, for poor quality housing, which is creating additional pressure on the whole echo system of society. Higher Educational Institutes and the society where they reside, are meant to coexist and thrive, not consume and deprive, which the current status quo entails. Equity and pension funds dominate the student accommodation market across Europe, viewing it as a safe investment venture, with their main goal being profit and not what is best for the students. Higher Education Institutes are becoming a part of the problem by encouraging these partnerships, with students being withheld their degrees by outstanding rent arrears from these corporations. The duty of care of Higher Education Institutes should be to provide the provisions our students need to access their right to fully participate in their education. To protect mobility and truly make our higher education systems accessible and inclusive to the citizens of Europe, accommodation is fundamental and utilizing the funding available in Europe. We insist that the European Union would make available ringfenced





resources from the European Investment bank for the European Universities Initiatives in order to build purpose built student accommodation that is sustainable, affordable and accessible.

## **5. Celebrating women in action**

To date, there is a lack of female role models for young girls to feel inspired and represented across industries and sectors (e.g. science, technology and others). Additionally, older women often face lower access rates to more executive and senior positions due to stereotypes and societal expectations imposed on them. It is important to create strong model references for young women to make sure they are equally represented, as well as have informed and undiscriminated access to all professional and educational opportunities. The European Union, through Higher Education, has to highlight, celebrate, encourage and promote female talent and participation in all sectors and industries. This could be achieved through the creation of a cross-industry and cross-country network of women with mentorship programs or events, both in person and online. Also, this could not be done without creating a solid online network supported by a website and an important social media presence. This action should be supported by strong marketing campaigns and the contribution of educational institutions at all levels, as well as other governmental and industry associations.

## **6. Inclusive structures and bases for University students across EU**

Structural differences between European universities such as unequal economic and social standards need to be acknowledged and tackled. The EU should empower its cohesive funds in the area of higher education to support the poorest as well as latest member states, because there is significant difference in, for example, buildings, equipment and accessibility, to make sure that every member of the EU and their people has an opportunity for sufficient education. More and equal opportunities should be provided to students coming from non-EU countries to promote equality in education as well.

### **6.1. Physical spaces**

During the pandemic the study spaces of different universities reduced their schedule and thus the access to their resources. It has to be considered to create a space to guarantee that all types of students have access to digital and non digital resources at any time. In order to create concrete European campuses, special spaces with an equal access for every student to information, with updated and performant technological material are required. Recommendations can be written to create the ideal library or workspaces to ensure that every student can work in the best conditions. This fund can be led by the EUC alliances which would





be in charge of the analysis of their territory to have a precise idea of what has to be upgraded, or what has to be built.

Ensure sufficient spaces and equipment for students to study at the Universities or take part in online classes. Places for students, staff and citizens to come together. The University staff have their own rooms and faculties to work and so should the students. There needs to be an establishment of all-accessible technical laboratories with essential tools, scientific apparatus and digital accessories in the Universities, so passionate students get engaged with it and share their knowledge and skills within their social circle without any hindrance. It will open doors to innovative outcomes while raising the number of citizen scientists in the society, bringing the University closer to the citizens. This would also deepen the cooperation between students and University staff.

## 6.2. Digital infrastructure

Cloud based education will allow students and other academics access to educational content, like tools, databases and softwares from the cloud i.e., content without having to download them onto their laptops or other devices. This will reduce the economical burden of buying high-end computers for their studies while also having access to cutting edge technology all at the same time. To achieve a digitalized and inclusive higher education in Europe, there should be a platform where students of all degrees could have the opportunity to share their paperwork, scientific research or ideas in the form of articles to other students, on an agreement by the student.

The academic work of students would be published in an online, open and accessible library that would include a large variety of literature, from articles to handbooks and more. Additionally, highlights of “best written” or “article of the week” could take place to promote student exchanges so that they could share their ideas face to face. This would prepare students to the research environment beyond their Bachelor and Master degrees. For closer cooperation between students from different universities, as many activities as possible should be organized between Universities, both physical and digital, which would help in the presentation, spread and exchange of ideas across different educational institutions.

## 7. Design-based education

Nowadays changes are needed in order to make education and learning innovative and engaging. It is not enough to study a degree and learn the necessary competencies - students must have a say in their curriculum and interests. Design-based education is a student-centered approach to education on all levels. Furthermore, ensuring that graduates obtain the skills of





the 21st century combining research-based education, multiculturalism and multilingualism, a strong global and European perspective, flexible learning paths should be designed. All within their interests and future professionals goals. Moreover, an open educational structure **should** be promoted where students are taught and given the opportunity to practice leadership skills, critical thinking, solve practical situations and problems, gain exposure to entrepreneurship, see a bigger picture, and demonstrate the 'value' of things rather than focusing on 'only' scoring highest in tests. This shift away from standardized learning will prepare students to make a positive impact on the social and economic wellbeing of their communities and surroundings.

Applying a student-managed learning process would drive their motivation and self-development and active engagement in education by taking matters into their own hands. In addition, due to the changing demands of the labor market and society, universities should give even more emphasis on improving young peoples' cognitive skills instead of simple gain of knowledge. Furthermore, investing in test scores should not be the goal.

This will create an opportunity for students to identify their own learning needs, set their own goals and ensure the quality and outcomes of their studies. This system improves the competitiveness level of European education worldwide.

## 8. Student Democracy in European Universities

For the European University Initiatives to encourage the promotion of student council or parliament within their own alliances, which would be aligned with the European Union's values of Democracy. This can grow into a European Universities Initiatives wide European Student Parliament, where a representative from each alliance would knowledge share, collaborate and work together for the best interests of the students in Europe. This collective of representation can be founded on the model of the Inaugural session of the European Student Assembly. This model should be the base of European student democracy.

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