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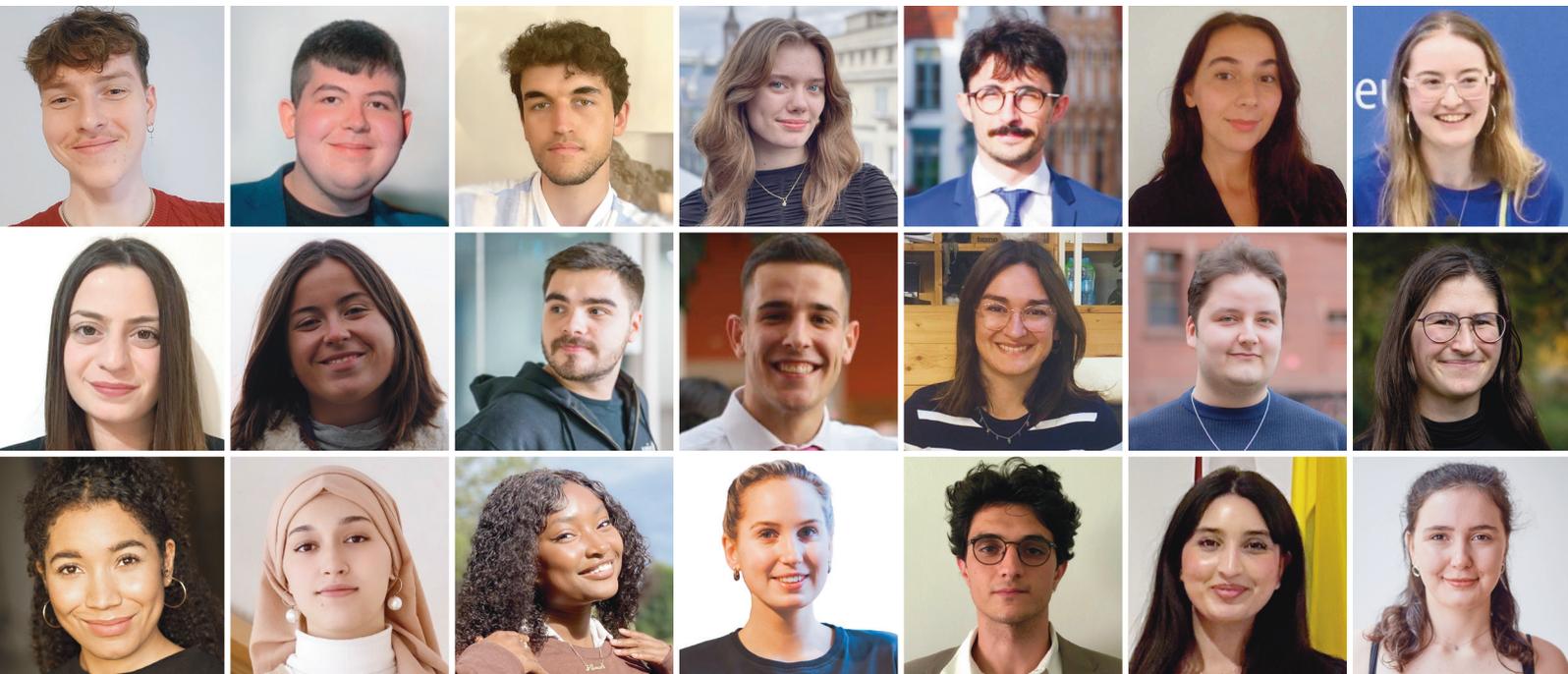
COMPENDIUM

EUROPEAN POLITICS AND
INSTITUTIONS PROGRAMME

TRANSNATIONALISATION
PROGRAMME

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Youth Driven, Future Focused: Young Perspectives on the 2024 European Parliament Elections



Introduction

The 2024 European Parliament elections are approaching with an important novelty. For the first time, several European Union (EU) member states have allowed citizens from 16 years to cast their vote, giving young Europeans a stronger stake in defining Europe's future. This comes at a crucial time for European politics, when – faced with permacrisis and the need to adapt to several societal transitions (green, digital, demographic, economic) at the same time – Europe must go through change to ensure a prosperous and secure future.

In this interconnected Europe, many youth concerns do not have boundaries. Young people from all over Europe face similar problems and obstacles to their growth and well-being. Politicians and policymakers in the EU would, therefore, be in an ideal position to play a vital role in meeting youth needs. This can happen by strengthening the EU's action in areas of concern for the youth, such as climate change, social policies, employment, education, health, and security policies, and by consolidating a youth pillar across all areas of action.

Ahead of the next European Parliament elections, two aspects of the debate about youth participation and inclusion in politics are resurfacing: youth representativity and representation. Together, they reflect the importance of rejuvenating the cohort of MEPs (the average age is 49 in 2019-2024, and 53 in 2014-2019), and making them more receptive to youth concerns.

This compendium provides a platform for young perspectives, asking young Europeans what drives their

generation to vote and how are the European Parliament elections relevant to them. We wanted to know about the topics that young people bring to these elections.

This compendium aims to showcase how youth concerns, interests, and desires for the future should resonate with the EU priorities for the next five years. It collects perspectives from young contributors between 17 and 30 years who followed our call for contributions. They include young authors from the European Policy Centre and from Connecting Europe's network of civil society organisations, think tanks, network projects and fellowship programs.

From these contributions two trends are observed. Firstly, the fight to save the environment while climate change continues to be of concern for Europe's youth. Secondly, we noticed an increased focus on securitisation and militarisation in many contributions. Following the decade-long permacrisis, and most importantly, the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, the contributions reflect that the peaceful Europe that many of us grew up with is no more. For this generation, war became a central issue of their political socialisation. Hence, its repercussions are reflected in many contributions.

The contributions illustrate the urgency of change for European politics. Change that leads to a better future by addressing intergenerational aspects. Young voters are central for this task –their vote matters.

Why vote? Young Europeans & democratic participation



Building European legitimacy: Youth participation in democratic processes

Luca Frenkert, participant of Stiftung Mercator's 2019 Meet!Europa Tour

The EU faces major criticism: its perceived lack of legitimacy and representation of European citizens, given the diversity of member states and the absence of a shared national identity. To master future storms, the EU must bolster its legitimacy, which is a joint responsibility of member states and institutions. Like a strawberry cake, the EU's legitimacy is built from output legitimacy (the dough) and input legitimacy (strawberries and cream).

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Output legitimacy is the foundation of the EU's legitimacy: it can be seen as the cake's dough. It stems from the EU's ability to solve policy problems more effectively than member states acting alone, and it has the greatest advantage over the member states. But without toppings, the cake is not very appealing.

Therefore, input legitimacy is key to success. It stems from the functioning of the institutions, representing the electorate at European level. It is essential to gain the people's trust and to ensure their participation in the political process. It is the cake's cream, which is the first layer of the toppings.

But there is more to input legitimacy. Without strawberries, the cake remains incomplete. High voter turnout in European elections is crucial to ensure the European Parliament truly represents citizens' wishes and, therefore, it is crucial to input legitimacy.

Therefore, if we are to strengthen European democracy, it is crucial to engage younger generations in voting. Young people can develop a habit of voting and play an active role in European democracy now and in the long run. This enhances the Parliament's importance and strengthens the relevance of young voices across Europe.

Therefore, the EU, member states and EU institutions, must address its legitimacy concerns by encouraging greater participation in European Parliament elections, particularly among younger voters. There are plenty of ways to make it happen, whether ramping up communication and info sharing on digital platforms, tapping into the European identity of younger generations to inspire responsibility, or putting youth issues front and centre in the European dialogue. This will ensure a better representation of European citizens' interests and enhance the Union's democratic legitimacy, akin to a fully assembled strawberry cake.

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Protect European democracy with your vote
Kaan Turhal, “Ruhrpott für Europa” initiative

In today’s world, democracy is facing threats from various quarters. Right-wing extremists, neo-fascists, and enemies of democracy are exerting their influence without any qualms, while authoritarian leaders like Xi Jinping and Putin loom large as a constant threat. However, we should remain confident that we can counter this threat with a new, young, and innovative approach that supports democracy.

To safeguard the interests of the European Union, it is high time that we start listening to the younger generation. For far too long, they have been excluded from the political discourse, but the time has come to change that. Lowering the voting age to 16 is a good start, but it is not enough. All EU member states must follow suit and give young people more opportunities to participate in politics. We need to embrace diversity in politics, and that means meeting young Europeans on an equal footing and giving them a voice.

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The upcoming European Parliament elections are of the utmost importance, as they will lay the foundation for the Union’s political direction at a time when the challenges facing us are greater than ever before. Depending on how much support the far-right will receive, its outcome could either unite or divide us. It is our responsibility to ensure that we do not let democracy falter, by casting our vote and voicing our preference for the future ahead.

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However, it is not enough to just exercise our right to vote. We need to be vocal and spread progressive European ideas – and convince also others to go to the ballots. Our appeal should be directed especially to those who do not conform to the white, rich European stereotype. Socially disadvantaged people, in particular, are less likely to vote. The election results often reflect the privileged view, and we need to counteract this. Politics concerns everyone, and it needs to be communicated in a way that resonates with all. Effective peer-to-peer communication is the key to achieving this. Therefore, I urge all friends of democracy and all Europeans to take action and see themselves as ambassadors of European values. Being European is not just about geography, it’s a feeling of home and community, shaping Europe together!

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To successfully and democratically tackle the permacrisis, Parliament needs unity

Raúl Villegas, Junior Policy Analyst at the European Policy Centre

Since the 2008 Euro crisis through to COVID-19 and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the crisis management mode that has dominated European policymaking has led to an increasingly side-lined European Parliament. Under emergency provisions such as Article 122 TFEU,¹ Council and Commission have managed to quickly roll out measures. However, in the process, democratic oversight and Parliament's role have risked becoming afterthoughts.²

A disempowered Parliament can only lead to greater electoral disaffection, creating openings for Eurosceptics and the far-right.

This trend is problematic on at least two fronts. Firstly, a disempowered Parliament can only lead to greater electoral disaffection, creating openings for Eurosceptics and the far-right. Secondly, although the permacrisis will continue to demand nimble responses, steering the EU away from it will take long-term thinking and foresight — for which a strong legislature, as well as a strong executive, is required.

With polls predicting a far-right surge³ in the upcoming elections, Parliament may fall short of that task: by becoming incapable of reaching consensus and coalitions and spending its energy undoing progress⁴ rather than thinking ahead.

Given the limited and lacklustre response by mainstream European parties to our generation's lion's share of the permacrisis — from long-term climate catastrophe to job insecurity and housing — the call for a 'tactical vote' against the far right is hardly inspiring on its own. Instead, young voters should cast a vote of confidence for those who believe in boosting the European project precisely to achieve a constructive and stronger Parliament — one that can fulfil⁵ and enhance⁶ the functions envisioned under the Treaty of Lisbon and make European democracy a principal actor in the management of the permacrisis.

Young voters should cast a vote of confidence for those who believe in boosting the European project precisely to achieve a constructive and stronger Parliament.

¹ Dermine, Paul, "[Article 122 TFEU and the future of the Union's emergency powers](#)", 25 January 2024.

² Keating, Dave, "[Changing the EU's Internal Balance of Power](#)", 6 September 2021.

³ Cunningham, Kevin *et al.*, "[A sharp right turn: A forecast for the 2024 European Parliament elections](#)", 23 January 2023.

⁴ O'Carroll, Lisa, "[EU green deal at 'very high' risk of being killed off, says Greens co-leader](#)", 23 April 2024.

⁵ Leinen, Jo *et al.*, "[Strasbourg round-up: MEPs call for treaty of Lisbon to be fully implemented](#)", 12 March 2014.

⁶ European Parliament, Draft report on proposals of the European Parliament for the amendment of the Treaties (2022/2051(INL)), 22 August 2023.

Reforming EU democracy



#UseYourVote: The younger generation must act now for positive change

Anna Weinrich, Board Member of the Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (Obessu)

The 2019 European Parliament elections witnessed an uptake in youth participation. This was a paradigm shift from the historical trend of low engagement among younger demographics.⁷ As we count the last weeks before the European Parliament elections, we reflect on the importance of bringing young people to the polls, and what is the collective project we want to shape by doing so.

In an era defined by complex global challenges, the upcoming European elections represent a crossroads for our future.

In an era defined by complex global challenges, the upcoming European elections represent a crossroads for our future. The fallbacks of the post-pandemic economic crisis, exacerbated by soaring inflation and escalating costs of living, together with geopolitical tensions and conflicts both within and beyond European borders, call, now more than ever, for proactive youth involvement in political processes.

As democratic rights are eroded by the rise of far-right ideologies, the fundamental principles of European democracy are under threat, the younger generation must act as catalysts for positive change by safeguarding the democratic values of equality, transparency, accountability, social and economic justice and diversity, both in voting processes and other political engagement, reclaiming public space through activism and other forms of participation.

Yet, many young people (under 18) do not have the right to vote. For this reason countless political parties, civil society, youth councils and youth organisations (including OBESSU) are calling for the lowering of the voting age to 16 years old in all member states.

By practising real democracy in educational spaces, far from tokenism and ticking-boxes-exercises, we could finally see education be truly transformative for democracy and our European societies.

Such legislation would empower young people with the agency to exercise their democratic rights, acknowledging their capacity for informed decision-making and fostering a culture of active citizenship from a formative age. However, this cannot be done, without prioritising citizenship education and promoting democracy within educational institutions, crucial places for nurturing politically aware generations. By practising real democracy in educational spaces, far from tokenism and ticking-boxes-exercises, we could finally see education be truly transformative for democracy and our European societies.

⁷ European Parliament, "[2019 European elections: Record turnout driven by young people](#)"; 24 September 2019.



Time to rejuvenate the EU treaties

Matteo Gorgoni, Programme Assistant
at the European Policy Centre

Youth participation in the last European Parliament elections soared,⁸ mainly owing to climate and environmental concerns.⁹ In the current context of permacrisis, young voters are again¹⁰ expected to drive the electoral turnout in 2024. Whatever their choice, young voters need to seize the upcoming elections to push for their demands and better represent young people's needs on the EU level. This includes young citizens paying greater attention to treaty reform challenges, which are important in structuring the EU's long-term action and maintaining their capacity to act in a crisis driven world.

Whatever their choice, young voters need to seize the upcoming elections to push for their demands and better represent young people's needs on the EU level.

Youth concerns have already made their way into the European treaties, thanks to past activism of youth organisations, and an increasing awareness of the added value of EU action in youth-related areas. Longstanding initiatives such as the European Social Fund promote youth employment, mobility, and training. Articles 165 and 166 TFEU provide the basis for EU action in the youth field, underpinning initiatives such as Erasmus, the European Solidarity Corps, and the reinforced Youth Guarantee, which substantially shape the environment of social, professional, and educational opportunities for young citizens.

However, treaty provisions also drastically limit the scope of action for the EU in this area. In light of the current treaties, youth policies have remained a national competence. Governance in the youth sector is limited to purely intergovernmental and legislatively non-binding coordination.

Therefore, the treaties clearly need an overhaul on youth policies. Future treaty change should include elevating youth policy as a shared competence, which could pave the way towards further integration of social policies. At times of ageing and declining demography in Europe, the EU should make a priority of setting an enabling environment for its youngest citizens, an ambition which should be reflected in the treaties.

Given the proactive role of the European Parliament in triggering treaty reforms, young citizens must see in the upcoming European elections an opportunity to influence EU action in their areas of concern. Future elected Members of the European Parliament need an even stronger mandate from younger generations for treaty change. This will be key to futureproof political choices over the next mandate, but also in making sure that future treaty reforms reflect youth concerns and expectations. After all, they are the future of Europe.

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⁸ Del Monte, Micaela, "[Youth participation in European elections](#)", December 2023.

⁹ European Parliament, "[The 2019 European elections: A pro-European – and young – electorate with clear expectations](#)", 12 July 2019.

¹⁰ Spirlet, Thibault, "[How young voters could again drive EU election turnout](#)", 23 April 2024.



Digital voting: How the EU can make itself more youth-friendly

Sabina Ahmeti, Project Assistant at the European Policy Centre

Since the first European elections in 1979, electoral turnout in the 2019 elections increased for the first time due to greater youth participation. However, to guarantee youth engagement in the future, the EU must prioritise initiatives to enhance youth participation in elections.

Another way to increase electoral turnout is to lower the voting age and expand voting accessibility through the possibility of online voting in all member states. With the younger generations growing up in a digital age and increasing EU mobility, Europeans should be able to vote from abroad and digitally. There are many barriers for mobile citizens to face when voting. For example, inclusive methods like e-voting remain uncommon: Estonia is the only member state offering e-voting for those living abroad in the upcoming EU elections. Concerns about digital security and privacy persist among national bodies with reservations about making changes. Whereas the protection of data privacy and digital security should not come at the expense

of hindering democratic processes or compromising citizens' ability to engage in their civic duties.

Amendments to the 1976 Electoral Act, adopted in 2018, already provide member states with the possibility to introduce alternative voting, including electronic and internet voting in elections in the European Parliament. However, even these loose guidelines are currently not in force as member states are blocking its implementation.

Therefore, new, binding rules concerning e-voting need to be adopted and implemented by all member states to foster more inclusivity in the civic space. Member states need to implement comprehensive measures aimed at resolving digital security and privacy concerns. Furthermore, revising the Electoral Act should ensure the effective enforcement of new rules enabling e-voting. This would reflect the priority of adapting to the evolving digital landscape and also resonate with the digital zeitgeist of youth, enabling civic engagement in contemporary society.



EurHope for treaty change: Young people defining Europe's future

Christelle Savall is President of the Young European Federalists (JEF Europe)

This year should be the year of hope. That is why JEF Europe, together with Make.org, launched EurHope, a participatory campaign ahead of the 2024 European Parliament Elections. More than 5,000 proposals emerged from the consultation and the first phase of the campaign. The proposals received 1.5 million votes and shaped the drafting of the Agenda of Hope which is putting 15 priorities from young citizens at the centre of the European public debate, such as employment, education or environment.

One conclusion from the campaign is that treaty change is required to cater for the proposals from young people and that there is public support to reform the EU. These proposals, such as strengthening a sovereign EU voice in diplomacy and EU action on inclusive and harmonised healthcare systems, are clear calls for EU reforms up to the change of treaties. The campaign demonstrates that young people care about the EU, but they also have clear and concrete proposals to shape its future, such as for

increasing citizen participation and their understanding of the EU.

Now our national leaders must continue the process that the European Parliament started by calling for changing the treaties through a Convention, as promised with the Conference on the Future of Europe.

When reforming the Treaties, we have an opportunity to strengthen the EU, make it more democratic, inclusive and effective. The treaty changes proposed by the European Parliament and the ones that JEF Europe has been advocating for years, such as the right of initiative of the European Parliament and the end to vetoes, would lead to a more functional and democratic EU and tackle the priorities of young people as shown in EurHope. It is imperative to achieve this in parallel to enlargement to prepare for its success and get us closer to a federal Europe – a guarantee of peace, democracy, rule of law and human rights, to give us all hope.

Environment & climate change



No time to lose: Youth leading the charge in the fight against climate change

Marialena Stagianni, Programme Assistant
at the European Policy Centre

With the European Parliament elections swiftly approaching, it is imperative to reflect on our collective future. The year 2023 stands out as the warmest on record, with Europe emerging as the continent experiencing the fastest rise in temperature.¹¹ However, recent months have seen a backlash against crucial regulations of the European Green Deal, the EU's prime strategy to counter climate change. Notably, political resistance at the Council regarding the nature restoration law,¹² amidst widespread farmer protests in Europe,¹³ are cause for concern, calling into question crucial elements of the EU's approach to climate change. Moreover, with the resurgence of far-right sentiments and conservative voices in both European and national political spheres, this worrying trend is not expected to stop. Hence, these elections bear immense significance in shaping critical environmental policies for the next five years.

These elections are a chance to rectify an existing expectations-delivery gap: A recent pan-European Euronews-Ipsos survey¹⁴ underscores that combating climate change is a top priority for over half of Europeans. But a comprehensive data analysis¹⁵ conducted by five prominent NGOs reveals that only a minority of MEPs in the 2019-2024 term actively acted to protect the environment, while the majority either delayed real action or completely failed to address the climate change challenge.

Given that young people are poised to bear the brunt of climate change's impacts, their presence in decision-making processes is paramount, both in the voting process and as elected representatives. It is encouraging in this respect that the increase in voter turnout in the previous EU elections can largely be attributed to the increased engagement of young Europeans in the voting process,¹⁶ reflecting a growing commitment among youngsters to participate in politics. Nonetheless, the average age of MEPs in the EU parliament remains relatively high at 53,¹⁷ with a negligible percentage of MEPs being under 30 years old.¹⁸

Young Europeans' engagement in EU elections and politics not only ensures their voices are heard but also brings fresh perspectives into the discourse on environmental issues. Electing more young representatives in the European Parliament could bring about a significant impact in the EU's environmental agenda direction. The youth represent the future, and it is time to shape their own destiny.

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¹⁴ Frost, Rosie, "[Over half of European voters think climate action is a priority, exclusive Euronews poll reveals](#)", *Euronews*, 25 March 2024.

¹⁵ *Climate Action Network (CAN) Europe*, "[Leading Environment and Climate Organisations Score European Parliament's 2019-2024 Performance](#)", 15 April 2024.

¹⁶ Del Monte, Micaela, "[Youth participation in European elections](#)", *European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS)*, 4 December 2023.

¹⁷ *European Parliament*, "[Trends: Average age of MEPs](#)" (accessed 7 May 2024).

¹⁸ *European Youth Forum*, "[Joint Statement: Let's get more young people into the next European Parliament](#)", 10 January 2024.



The chronic threat of short-sightedness risks dismissing the green agenda: we must not allow it

Constança Jardim, Programme Assistant
at the European Policy Centre

The chronic short-sightedness of politicians appears to be alive and kicking ahead of the June European Parliament elections. One blatant example is the de-prioritisation of the green agenda in favour of more immediate needs, such as strengthening European defence and appeasing farmers' discontent. Though these are valid priorities, pursuing them cannot come at the cost of future generations. This is where young voters must come in to remind policymakers of the climate emergency.

Civil society and policymakers have long fought for the green agenda. In 2019, the Green Deal was presented as a key critical political priority,¹⁹ promising to build a sustainable growth strategy to achieve climate neutrality by 2050. European society had then seemingly reached a consensus on the urgent and critical need to invest in sustainable economic development and abandon harmful practices.

In 2019, the Green Deal was presented as a key critical political priority, promising to build a sustainable growth strategy to achieve climate neutrality by 2050.

Since then, seemingly more pressing challenges have emerged,²⁰ leading to its de-prioritisation. First, policymakers increasingly focus on the need to build European defence capabilities in response to Russia's

invasion of Ukraine. This is reflected in the European People's Party's (EPP) manifesto,²¹ the parliamentary group most likely to top the polls at the June elections.²² In the manifesto, security is the top priority, with global climate protection only of secondary importance.

Second, in response to the recent farmers' protests highlighting the burden of the green agenda on the agricultural sector,²³ policymakers quickly lowered the hard-fought environmental standards in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).²⁴ Even though the increased focus on defence is understandable, and policymakers' responsiveness to farmers' concerns is appreciated, these should not come at the expense of long-term priorities.

The lack of focus on the green agenda leading up to the elections is a stark reminder of shifting priorities but also short-sightedness.

The lack of focus on the green agenda leading up to the elections is a stark reminder of shifting priorities but also short-sightedness. Young voters need to take matters into their own hands and ensure that long-term priorities such as climate neutrality are back on the European agenda. With the June vote, the European youth must once again highlight the urgent need for a sustainable growth strategy as the top priority to ensure our quality of life.

¹⁹ European Commission, "[The European Green Deal](#)", 11 December 2019.

²⁰ Moens, Barbara, "[Von der Leyen's 2nd-term pitch: More military might, less climate talk](#)", 19 February 2024.

²¹ European People's Party: "[EPP 2024 Manifesto](#)", 2024.

²² *Politico*, "[Poll of Polls European Parliament Elections](#)", 2024.

²³ Sanchez Manzanaro, Sofia, "Farmers should not bear EU green transition costs alone, says Letta report", 19 April 2024.

²⁴ Ruig, Piet, "[A race to the bottom: How the CAP green ambitions unravelled](#)", 1 April 2024.



The green wave: A call to action for climate and democracy

Rares Voicu, Board Member at the European Youth Forum

In the aftermath of the 2019 European Elections, commentators hailed the so-called ‘green wave’ that had swept across the EU - resulting in a mandate of the European Parliament that included the landmark Green Deal.

This wave was largely due to another observed phenomenon - a youth voting wave.²⁵ Young Europeans were clear at the polls and the youth-led Fridays for Future protests - we need to prioritise the health of people and planet in the EU’s political agenda.

However, current polls show an alarming rise in anti-democratic forces, which threaten commitments to democracy, human rights, EU values, and also the sustainability agenda. We hear a growing rhetoric that climate and environmentally focused policies are not in the interests of society, and should be halted, and even reversed.

Current polls show an alarming rise in anti-democratic forces, which threaten commitments to democracy, human rights, EU values, and also the sustainability agenda.

But as Europe continues to experience increasingly warmer temperatures and abnormal weather events, it is clear that the planet is not waiting for us to decide to act. And in building a greener society, we can also address the social and age-based inequalities we face.

Around 63% of young European voters intend to vote, with 15–24-year-olds most keen for more discussion around the topic of ‘action against climate change’.

Therefore just like in 2019 - we need young people to speak up and defend climate-focused policies. And there are reasons to be optimistic. Two million 16- and 17-year-olds in Austria, Belgium, Germany and Greece (only 17-year-olds) will have the right to vote for the first time. Around 63% of young European voters intend to vote, with 15–24-year-olds most keen for more discussion around the topic of ‘action against climate change’.²⁶

We need to use our vote to signal that the climate emergency is the challenge of our generation. We need to live within our planetary boundaries. We need a strong successor to the European Green Deal, and we need to speak up for nature and future generations.

²⁵ 2019 Eurobarometer Post Electoral Survey: The participation of under-25s rose by 14 percentage points compared to 2014, and by 12 percentage points for voters aged 25 to 39-year-olds.

²⁶ EP Spring 2024 Survey: Use your vote - Countdown to the European elections.



Youth voice in action: Shaping a greener and fairer Europe

Alejandro Castanedo Preciado, Programme Assistant at the European Policy Centre

The Green Deal has been one of the corner stones of European politics for the past five years. But for the years to come, we need to ensure that this sustainable transition is not only green but also social.

According to the Youth Survey 2021,²⁷ the main political concerns of young Europeans were the fight against poverty and social inequality (43%), the fight against climate change (39%) and the working conditions (37%). At the same time, more than 70% believe that²⁸ “young people have very little influence on European policy”. This is despite the fact that a higher participation of young voters in the 2019 European elections boosted the first increase in overall participation in its history,²⁹ breaking the myth that young people are not interested in politics.

Five years after the last EU elections, youth unemployment has practically remained the same and the conditions of access to a decent quality labour market have not improved. These conditions, combined with growing housing and rental prices, are among today’s most important social challenges for young citizens. In terms of environmental and social policies, the right and extreme right, often joined by liberal parties, are leading an unprecedented green backlash on climate goals and policies. These policies are also usually combined with an exponential increase in racist, xenophobic and intolerant speeches that focus on social inequalities rather than on factors that cause them.

In terms of environmental and social policies, the right and extreme right, often joined by liberal parties, are leading an unprecedented green backlash on climate goals and policies.

Given this situation and the proliferation of disinformation campaigns and reactionary populisms that try to alienate young people from the political reality by misleading them into believing that “it is not for them, nor will it solve their problems”. Young Europeans have to participate in these elections, because there is no better way to influence and improve policies and institutions than by participating in them.

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Young people must ensure that the commitments made on climate issues in the last years are fulfilled, but also that our social demands are addressed with a strong commitment from the institutions to translate them into concrete policies. Our lives depend on it, and we cannot let other people decide our future and the future of our planet without participating in the process.

²⁷ Eurobarometer, [Youth Survey 2021](#).

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Eurobarometer, [Post-election survey 2019 – first results](#).

Social policies, education & jobs



Building on recent progress: supporting young people's transition to work

Giulia Romagnolo, founder of StartNet Youth, an organisation that supports a smoother transition from school to work in Southern Italy.

Every day, I see young people with great potential dreaming of sustainable work and struggling to use their full capabilities.

The lack of stringent sustainability regulations for companies can hinder young people's aspirations for sustainable work. When companies are not held accountable to rigorous sustainability standards, they are less inclined to implement eco-friendly practices and create sustainable job opportunities. This limits the availability of roles aligned with young people's sustainability goals, making it challenging for them to utilise their full potential. Additionally, individual barriers like skills gaps and personal circumstances can further impede their progress. Addressing external and internal barriers is crucial to empower young people with sustainability aspirations.

The lack of stringent sustainability regulations for companies can hinder young people's aspirations for sustainable work.

This challenge not only hinders individual progress but also limits the growth and innovation young people bring to the workforce. Therefore, future policies and initiatives need to provide targeted support to enable every young person to realise their potential and contribute to society and the economy.

From this perspective, the upcoming EU leadership needs to continue the progressive path set by the current Commission. This path aims to break down barriers and create more accessible opportunities for young people to enter the workforce seamlessly. The evaluation of the 21 Quality Principles for Traineeships³⁰ is a significant step in this direction, emphasising the need for high-quality learning experiences and working conditions that align with the evolving needs of today's youth.

As we approach the 2024 European Parliament elections, it becomes even more crucial for young people to engage actively in shaping policies that directly impact their futures.

Looking ahead, I am hopeful that our future representatives will build upon these foundations, enhancing young people's access to tailored training and employment opportunities that empower them to pursue dignified, fair, and fulfilling career paths. As we approach the 2024 European Parliament elections, it becomes even more crucial for young people to engage actively in shaping policies that directly impact their futures. My vote will surely reflect these expectations. By addressing these points, we not only enable professional growth but also contribute to the overall prosperity and sustainability of our society, creating a brighter future for all.

³⁰ European Commission, "[Traineeships: Commission evaluation analyses impact of European quality framework](#)", 10 January 2023.



More inclusivity, less Eurocentrism: Reform our education systems!

Samet Beşyaprak, participant of Stiftung Mercator's
2022 Meet!Europa Tour

Our education systems in Europe are deeply influenced by strong Eurocentrism, which not only exacerbates social injustices but also impedes educational success. By predominantly emphasising European history, literature, and cultural norms, our Eurocentric education limits our comprehension of the interconnectedness of our world and obstructs our ability to appreciate and respect the contributions, experiences, and knowledge of non-European cultures and societies. For instance, indigenous perspectives, which offer profound insights into sustainable living, interconnectedness with nature, and community-centric approaches, are frequently disregarded or marginalised within Eurocentric education systems. This approach not only sidelines the rich diversity of European cultures but also perpetuates a skewed view of global affairs, diminishing the significance of non-European developments. Such a narrow curriculum fosters a sense of superiority and obstructs genuine intercultural exchange.

Indigenous perspectives, which offer profound insights into sustainable living, interconnectedness with nature, and community-centric approaches, are frequently disregarded or marginalised within Eurocentric education systems.

Furthermore, viewing education solely as a means of producing human capital commodifies learning, reducing it to a mere tool for economic productivity rather than recognising its intrinsic value for personal development and societal advancement. These neoliberal ideologies undermine the crucial role of education in fostering critical thinking, empathy, and solidarity—qualities essential for a thriving democratic society.

In Germany, the influence of the EU on education is evident, often prioritising economic efficiency over educational equity. Today, EU directives and policies shape educational standards and resource allocation across member states, impacting how standardised testing and resource disparities manifest in disadvantaged communities. The EU's involvement extends further through funding mechanisms and guidance on curriculum development, significantly shaping the educational landscape within its member states. Such standardised testing and performance metrics exacerbate social disparities by disadvantaging students from marginalised backgrounds who struggle to meet predetermined standards. Insufficient resources in disadvantaged communities widen the educational gap, perpetuating cycles of poverty and exclusion.

This underscores the importance of the upcoming European elections, as they will determine the future direction of education policy across the continent. Therefore, it is crucial for the EU to promote inclusive and equitable education policies, even though education is primarily managed at the national or regional level. Prioritising authentic learning over narrow Eurocentrism and economic interests is essential. Only through such reforms at the European level can we unleash the transformative power of education to build a fairer and more sustainable society for everyone.

It is crucial for the EU to promote inclusive and equitable education policies, even though education is primarily managed at the national or regional level.



Erasmus and the importance of voting for a tolerant society

Alisa Koester, Programme Manager at the German-Turkish Youth Bridge

I am a child of Europe. I grew up without borders (thanks, Schengen!) and barely remember a time before the Euro. But Erasmus made an impact on my understanding of Europe, which was transformative, broadening my perspectives and forging lifelong friendships.

The Erasmus programme in the European Union is a beacon of opportunity, connection, and growth.

It is not just about studying abroad but about cultural exchange, breaking down barriers, and fostering a sense of European identity. As such, the Erasmus programme in the European Union is a beacon of opportunity, connection, and growth.

Erasmus embodies the essence of what the European Union stands for: unity, cooperation, and understanding among nations. By enabling students to study in different EU countries and to meet with students from different countries, it promotes cross-cultural awareness and appreciation, lays the groundwork for a more cohesive and tolerant society and encourages young people to become active participants of our democracy.

Our generation holds the key to shaping the future of Europe, and our voices must be heard. Voting in the 2024 European Parliament elections is not just a right but a responsibility and a way for us to actively contribute to the society we want to live in – particularly when the current power balance is expected to shift in favour of right-wing populist forces.

By voting in the upcoming European elections, we can ensure that policies like Erasmus continue to receive support and funding. We can elect leaders who champion youth empowerment, education, and international cooperation. In a changing political landscape, our votes need to uphold the EU's core principles of openness, intercultural exchange, and tolerance across borders. We vote because Europe is stronger when we stand together.

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A paradigm shift in employment policies

Kel Nkondock, #DiasporaVote! Ambassador & Communications Officer at the Green European Foundation

In the past year, I have witnessed a significant shift among young professionals within my close circles. Lawyers have left prestigious firms to pursue careers in sustainable development, engineers have abandoned their jobs to travel the world, and pharmacists have turned down offers from medical device manufacturers to engage in unpaid missions in the Global South. These examples are more than mere chance—they highlight a shifting paradigm in how young people perceive the world of work today.

The narrative that millennials are the first generation in centuries to be worse off than their parents persists, casting a shadow over Generation Z's prospects. Young professionals often find that obtaining multiple degrees and completing numerous -often unpaid- internships are prerequisites for landing entry-level positions. These jobs that frequently demand long hours and entail enduring lengthy commutes, hardly suffice to afford rent in a shared apartment. When these concerns are voiced, young professionals are often dismissed as lazy or overly demanding.

The narrative that millennials are the first generation in centuries to be worse off than their parents persists, casting a shadow over Generation Z's prospects.

Yet, young people today exhibit a growing social consciousness compared to older generations. While they may hesitate to accept positions at companies that don't adhere to sustainable standards or at multinationals with questionable labour practices,

they also challenge the notion that self-realisation must be solely derived from work. They seek more than just monetary gain from their jobs; they long for a sense of fulfilment. A recent Randstad report³¹ revealed that 58% of individuals aged 18 to 24 would contemplate leaving their job if it didn't offer a satisfactory work-life balance. This illustrates the shifting perspectives on work among the youth.

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As the European Parliament elections approach, policymakers must acknowledge and address the evolving challenges faced by today's youth. While many EU policies focus on creating jobs, more comprehensive measures are necessary. It's crucial to ensure that the jobs available to young people provide decent working conditions, promote a healthy work-life balance, and offer financial security, especially amidst the current cost-of-living crisis. Initiatives like NextGenerationEU hold promise in this regard, but it requires political will to enact meaningful change.

³¹ Randstad, "[Empleo en la generación Z: el 38% ha dejado un trabajo por su vida personal](#)", 26 May 2023.

Justice & migration



Justice on the ballot: The vision of multicultural youth for the 2024 European elections

Loubna Reguig, Policy and Campaigns Officer at #DiasporaVote!

This year, the European elections will be held under the symbol of Themis, the goddess of justice. As we march from the streets to the ballot boxes, young Europeans from diasporas and minorities, aspire to achieve holistic justice: social, environmental, digital and international.

We need a fundamental shift of our economic paradigms and structures to ensure climate justice where the communities most affected, at home and abroad, are protected from the damages of pollution and environmental neglect.

Why did it have to take so long until climate change was taken seriously, when numerous climate refugees have existed in many of the poorer nations, highlighting colonial legacy in climate work, and the need for climate justice. Our vision of the Green Deal goes beyond replacing petrol cars with electric ones or decorating cities with solar panels. We need a fundamental shift of our economic paradigms and structures to ensure climate justice where the communities most affected, at home and abroad, are protected from the damages of pollution and environmental neglect.

Internationally, we are losing patience with the EU's selective position on humanity crises, from Palestine and Ukraine to Syria and Congo. This inconsistency highlights the urgent need for a profound change that heals our institutional hypocrisy and upholds a values system for all, where every refugee, and every civilian is equal.

The recent reform of migration policy, for instance, represents a betrayal of our fundamental principles.

When it comes to regulating artificial intelligence, critics from organisations such as Amnesty International and European Digital Rights (EDRI) argue³² that the EU's AI Act falls short, prioritising commercial interests over the protection of fundamental rights and privacy. For instance, Amnesty International³³ criticises the Act's failure to ban public mass surveillance or regulate the export of such technologies, describing it as setting a "devastating global precedent."

We are in a critical time where every aspect of our lives and public policy is impacted. Only by placing justice and our values at the heart of every decision can our representatives truly make our voices heard.

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As the elections approach, we need change in all these policy areas – social, environmental, digital, and international. We hope that candidates will not allow the balance of justice to collapse, contenting themselves with the blindfold without the scales. For us, multicultural young Europeans, 2024 will be more than just another election. It represents an ultimate chance to shape a fair, equitable and sustainable future for all.

³² Amnesty International *et al.*, "[EU's AI Act fails to set gold standard for human rights](#)", 3 April 2024.

³³ Amnesty International, "[EU: Bloc's decision to not ban public mass surveillance in AI Act sets a devastating global precedent](#)", 9 December 2023.



From apathy to action: How the EU Migration Pact fuelled youth political engagement

Alimat Babatunde, #DiasporaVote! Ambassador

The adoption of the New Pact³⁴ will introduce sweeping changes to Europe's migration and asylum systems. It includes a mechanism to systematically identify, filter and collect personal biometric data from migrants, including children from the age of six. Screening and controls³⁵ will be allowed in member states' territories, raising the risk of ethnic profiling.

In this current political climate, young people are becoming more consciously alert about human rights and social cohesion.

At the same time, these reforms have made many young people more aware, including about the upcoming EU elections. In this current political climate, young people are becoming more consciously alert about human rights and social cohesion. Consequently, the Pact has forced young people to reflect on EU values, freedom, democracy, and equality and whether our representatives are upholding this at all costs.

This election is a pivotal moment for young people to make a change. In the last months, we have witnessed protests and lobbying that undermine our social cohesion. Yet, with the June vote, we can hold policymakers accountable for their choices. Voting will allow us to protect our future, values, and interests. Thus, there has been a rapid rate of young people registering to vote.

Europe's young generation is a melting pot of citizens with different backgrounds and coming from various life paths. Their representation is paramount to young people's motivation to vote. We cannot comfortably watch authorities that do not represent or even think about marginalised communities' interests to make decisions that will directly and negatively affect us all.

Many EU policies on migration do nothing but reproduce and consolidate the sentiment of 'us versus them'. No one is born marginalised; it is the system that creates differences. Young people want to take a pro-European stance and form societies that can work together, regardless of people's backgrounds and identities. Therefore, to demolish these differences in status and treatment, young people should and will vote in this EU election.

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³⁴ European Parliament, "[MEPs approve the new Migration and Asylum Pact](#)", 10 April 2024.

³⁵ PICUM, "[The EU Migration Pact: a dangerous regime of migrant surveillance](#)", 11 April 2024.



Safeguarding freedom of movement by protecting EU values

Taru Granholm, Communications and Advocacy Specialist at Youth for Understanding

Freedom of movement is one of the core benefits established by the EU. For young people, this freedom means embarking on exchanges, pursuing studies, volunteering, working, or simply exploring any of the 27 member states with minimal bureaucratic hassle.

This ease of mobility and cultural immersion play a vital role in promoting peace among people and nations through increased mutual understanding. Intercultural exchanges not only foster personal connections but also broaden our global perspective, enhancing our ability to empathise and communicate across borders.

Recent years have witnessed movements within some member states that challenge EU values, advocating for leaving the EU or promoting anti-democratic and racist agendas.

However, we should not take this freedom for granted. Recent years have witnessed movements within some member states that challenge EU values, advocating for

leaving the EU or promoting anti-democratic and racist agendas. Such movement not only undermine the EU core values but also threaten our freedom as young people to engage with our European community and work together towards peace. When bureaucratic and financial barriers between countries increase, our engagement with one another becomes more difficult, leading to less dialogue and an increased psychological distance between people. Anti-democratic movements and ultraconservative, nationalistic initiatives feed into increased polarisation, which leaves very little space for empathy and understanding, the cornerstones for fostering the values of democratic and peaceful societies.

It is crucial that we take action to protect the values we hold dear. Whether through active participation in elections or advocating for policies that uphold freedom and equality, we must realise that safeguarding our rights and freedom is a collective responsibility. No one else will do it for us.

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Foreign & security policy



Support for Ukraine epitomizes what we want our future to look like

Riccardo Bosticco, Programme Assistant at the European Policy Centre

If you were born in the EU after 1992, you would be part of the “Maastricht Generation”.³⁶ Young people tend to identify with the values of the European project: respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and human rights. Yet, following recent crises and raging wars, there is increasing disillusion with an unjust world. The secure and prosperous environment is no more.

Following recent crises and raging wars, there is increasing disillusion with an unjust world. The secure and prosperous environment is no more.

Like around 47%³⁷ of all Europeans, you are frustrated by the EU’s political system functions.³⁸ You know what the EU is but have never been taught about it at school. With that comes the perception of deficits in the EU’s democracy, of living far from “Brussels”, and even apathy,³⁹ which forms the ingredients of a disillusion recipe. At the same time, the EU and its member states are among the happiest countries in the world.⁴⁰ But now, events in Ukraine and the Middle East demonstrate the actual price of peace, stability, and prosperity.

Security is the precondition for the ease and all the things taken for granted. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has changed the world,⁴¹ and the years ahead will be formative for the EU. Unconditional support

for Ukraine’s victory and independence is not just a political stance but a necessary condition for us to secure a prosperous future in the EU and the world. Without immediate action in Ukraine’s favor, our security is at risk.

For the Maastricht Generation, for the first time, war feels close and threatening. At this juncture, the European Parliament elections come as a test case. Support for Ukraine is not the only issue but a decisive one: it epitomises what we want our future to look like. A supportive European Parliament could lead the EU to a firmer stance against Russia and illiberalism in general. Aspiring to a functioning democracy, Ukrainians are fighting for our future.

By recognising this, and as we envision the world of tomorrow, that support would serve as a common denominator to allow reflection on how to adjust the EU and find a common stance to address other pressuring problems, from inequalities and climate change to other brutal wars in all corners of the world.

Aspiring to a functioning democracy, Ukrainians are fighting for our future.

³⁷ Krastev, Ivan and Mark Leonard, “[Wars and elections: How European leaders can maintain public support for Ukraine](#)”, 21 February 2024.

³⁸ Cammaerts, Bart, Michael Bruter, Shakuntala Banaji, Sarah Harrison, and Nick Anstead. “The Myth of Youth Apathy: Young Europeans’ Critical Attitudes Toward Democratic Life.” *American Behavioral Scientist* 58, no. 5 (2013): 645–64.

³⁹ Bouza, Luis, “[Addressing Youth Absenteeism in European Elections](#)”, 2014.

⁴⁰ World Population Review, “[Happiest Countries in the World 2024](#)”, 8 May 2024.

⁴¹ Coles, Stuart *et al.*, “[Seven ways Russia’s war on Ukraine has changed the world](#)”, 20 February 2023.



A geopolitical Europe that leaves no one behind

Oumaima El Fakir, Operations Assistant at the European Policy Centre

“In order for me to write poetry that isn’t political, I must listen to the birds and in order to hear the birds the warplanes must be silent”. **Marwan Makhoul**

While I was extremely proud to witness the resilience the EU demonstrated in supporting Ukraine’s resistance against Russian aggression, its failure to hold Israel to account for violations of international law, or to call for something greater than a “humanitarian pause”, remains incredibly heart-wrenching to watch.

Countless images of suffering, live-streamed killing of civilians and indiscriminate targeting of children, journalists, aid workers, schools, and hospitals; for the last few months, we have been absorbing this uncut violence. But we don’t want to be numb to it, neither we wish to be complicit of it. Even if rhetoric and discourses in foreign policy have no substantial impact on any war, these words have an impact on us, the European citizens of Arab descent, on how we associate this selective empathy, to the perception of our value as human beings within the European Union.

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As genocides, war crimes, global injustices reach and haunt us with the tap of a finger in this digital era, EU foreign policy should do better than cultivate a cognitive dissonance which portrays the betrayal of history’s lessons.

The EU elections are just around the corner. Let the unspeakable atrocities in Gaza, alongside too many others unfold around the world, be a transformative moment for us, the youth, to shape Europe’s future as a normative power. The voices we share on social media and the peaceful marches we attend will have a greater resonance at the ballot box. This is how we will contribute to ensuring the influence of a “geopolitical Europe” which is a value-based defender of human rights and leaves no one behind.

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The call to arms: Empowering youth voices in the debate on an EU army

Nina Wegenaer participated in Stiftung Mercator's 2023 Meet!Europa Tour

In the run-up to the 2024 European Parliament elections, the prospect of an EU army looms above the younger generation, stirring both excitement and apprehension. Debates on defence and security policies have become urgent considerations as war rages on the continent, shaping the future of young Europeans and the trajectory of the EU.

And with European countries bolstering their defences, the Union faces evolving security challenges and geopolitical tensions, intensifying discussions on establishing a unified military force. For young people, who are the future of Europe, these developments carry both opportunities and concerns.

Amid the rise of extremists and anti-democratic parties in Europe, many young Europeans value peaceful and democratic cooperation.

The prospect of a united army raises concerns about the allocation of tax money, democratic oversight, and potential militarisation of EU policies. Amid the rise of extremists and anti-democratic parties in Europe, many young Europeans value peaceful and democratic cooperation. They may be apprehensive about the implications of further centralising military power at the EU level and others may have concerns about the potential overlap with existing military alliances, such as NATO.

But beyond the traditional realms of defence, an EU army could be a symbol of unity and sovereignty, reflecting the EU's aspirations for greater autonomy on the global stage. It has the potential to embody the essence of the EU's motto "United in Diversity", as a stronger and more cohesive EU defence architecture may resonate as a symbol of collective strength and solidarity.

Despite aforementioned concerns, an EU army offers great opportunities for cross-border collaboration and exchange initiatives, potentially forging a stronger sense of European identity among the youth if practiced correctly. As these multifaceted discussions continue, it's crucial to involve young people in shaping Europe's security landscape and the future direction of the European project.

In conclusion, the EU should consider forming its own army unit and explore the feasibility of conscription to strengthen the European cohesion. Engaging youth in shaping the future of the Union, including defending European values collectively, is vital to ensure none of their concerns come true.

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The **European Policy Centre** is an independent, not-for-profit think tank dedicated to fostering European integration through analysis and debate, supporting and challenging European decision-makers at all levels to make informed decisions based on sound evidence and analysis, and providing a platform for engaging partners, stakeholders and citizens in EU policymaking and in the debate about the future of Europe.

The **European Politics and Institutions** programme covers the EU's institutional architecture, governance and policymaking to ensure that it can move forward and respond to the challenges of the 21st century democratically and effectively. It also monitors and analyses political developments at the EU level and in the member states, discussing the key questions of how to involve European citizens in the discussions over the Union's future and how to win their support for European integration. The programme has a special focus on enlargement policy towards the Western Balkans, questions of EU institutional reform and illiberal trends in European democracies.

Connecting Europe is a joint initiative of the European Policy Centre and Stiftung Mercator. The main objective of Connecting Europe is to connect civil-society organisations with EU decision-makers and to transnationalise EU policy debates. The project covers topics relevant to the EU policy community as well as to the 45+ partner organisations: rule of law and democracy, climate change, the digital transformation, as well as the future of EU foreign policy.

Connecting Europe is part of the **Transnationalisation** programme that facilitates a transnationalised debate on Europe's key challenges through enhancing collaboration with think tanks and civil society across Europe.

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