



Manifesto from the European Youth

This manifesto is based on the discussions that took place among students from Czechia, France, Greece and Serbia during the YouthEU project's events in their respective capitals and in Brussels. It summarises their thoughts on how they perceive the EU and how they envision addressing the challenges of tomorrow. The document will be expanded upon in the experts' policy papers, written in cooperation with the students, and presented to high-level national and European policymakers. The text will also be distributed among stakeholders, experts and the public, interested in the outcomes. The manifesto will be accompanied by a small handbook for the youth written by the project's experts, which will provide input on how the youth can address Euroscepticism and promote the European idea.

Addressing Euroscepticism

Although various academic and popular articles note that younger generations tend to hold more favourable attitudes towards the EU, this fact cannot be generalised as there are various factors shaping this perception, such as economic, social or regional aspects.

Throughout the implementation of the project students were discussing their perceptions of the EU and the challenges and circumstances that lead to the phenomenon of Euroscepticism in their countries. Although their views differed slightly on topical issues such as migration, the financial crisis or national sovereignty, their main concern connected to the anti-EU narratives stems from the lack of information about the EU. This should, according to the students, be tackled through a reform of an educational system that should provide not only broader information about the EU and its functioning but also a more on-the-ground understanding of what the EU provides to its citizens.

Students perceived ideas such as European citizens' lessons or further expansion of the Erasmus programme as ideal tools for achieving this goal. Students also feel that the pro-European sentiments among youth are often taken for granted and not constructively developed through further education about the EU. They also feel that the communication about the EU lately focuses predominantly on tackling disinformation and targeting those that are rather sceptical towards the EU, rather than strengthening ties with the youth.

In contrast to the general perception of sources of Euroscepticism, which often stem from a lack of communication and disinformation about the EU, the youth perceived this issue from a different angle. They are generally in favour of the continuation of European integration and their frustrations with the EU often stem from the inefficiency of the voting processes or discrepancies between the policies of Member states. Very often, they also expect the EU to deliver on areas, which are not in the competencies of the EU, only corroborating the need for strengthened education programmes about the functioning of the Union.

According to the students, Euroscepticism does not have to be seen as problematic as long as it leads to a better understanding of the EU and the use of critical thinking, which should be encouraged. Nevertheless, this perception should not be stemming from misinformation or disinformation which are often created by national political narratives. Often, the discussions of the causes of Euroscepticism led to discussions about particular EU affairs and how these need to be approached to create a better understanding of the EU's roles and functioning, and to answer the worries of citizens from different member states. To conclude, the students were naturally drawn into discussing Euroscepticism through the different issues that they find important in their country or as young people in the EU.



Priorities identified by the students in Brussels round

During the sessions in Brussels, the following topics resonated with the students the most: environment, social aspects of the EU policies, and democracy and European values. However, the discussions addressed also the importance of enhanced education about the EU in schools, external relations of the EU with other actors (both with the countries in the European neighbourhoods aspiring for EU membership or with authoritarian global powers), the impact of the Russian war in Ukraine, and the questions related to European security. Throughout the discussions, students highlighted the following recommendations:

1. Greener and more sustainable Europe

- a. EU should **subsidize** publicly owned companies that produce renewable energy.
- b. Energy should be shared through a common **European energy system**.
- c. **Nuclear energy** plays an important role as a transition source and provides energy security in times of insufficient production from renewable sources, though it should be treated as a “backup” option, not the main energy source.
- d. EU should support **more research** initiatives in the area of green transition and environmentally friendly development (especially in rural areas).
- e. EU needs to better monitor, regulate, and **penalize** anti-environmental behaviours of industries (e.g. releasing toxic substances).
- f. EU should enforce compliance with fishing quotas and protect **marine life**.
- g. EU should better control and limit the number of **animals** in slaughterhouses per square kilometer. Overall, more efforts to limit meat production are necessary.
- h. Changes in the **agricultural** policy are needed – the land is controlled by large companies and harmed by pesticides. EU should increase support of small companies, public and sustainable agriculture.
- i. The EU should develop a scheme for subsidizing **public transportation** and the use of bicycles or other environmentally friendly means of transport.
- j. A common policy for promoting **electric transport** should be developed, potentially taking steps towards banning non-electric cars. This should also be further supported by the national governments.

2. Democratic and free Europe

- a. All EU Member States must have at least one media outlet financed from the state budget (**national broadcaster**) and not by any private individual or corporation.
- b. The **independence of media** is crucial, and the EU should create regulations forbidding politicians from owning news outlets.
- c. If media are owned or financed by private individuals or corporations, they must be **transparent**; content consumers must be aware of the media outlet’s background funding and ownership and marketing deals that further finance the outlet.
- d. The EU should further develop **tools for monitoring** of harmful content and algorithms on social media and create legislation protecting users from misinformation, misuse, and interference from governments, companies or other interested parties.
- e. A media outlet is to be established and funded from the EU funds, centred around news **related to the European Union**, with the goal of transmitting real and checked information about the EU to the citizens of the EU Member States (similar to Euronews). This outlet should be broadcasted in each language of the EU and accessible freely in every Member State.

- f. The EU should support **digital e-voting** and promotion of it across its Member States and especially in rural and not easily accessible areas.
- g. More **monitoring of the elections**. People who take care of the credibility of elections should be approved by the EU, as a guarantee of independence and quality. A state committee will then be formed with these people. The EU will supply and fund these state committees, thereby allowing them to implement digital voting with their respective elections. If the EU was directly monitoring the transparency of national elections there would be a risk of holding the EU accountable in case of fraud/falsification in a member state.
- h. The EU should maintain its position as a regulatory power, especially when it comes to the field of **data protection**, assuring highest standards through its legislation (GDPR).

3. SOCIAL AND JUST EUROPE

- a. The EU should introduce **positive discrimination** in governmental positions through the application of quotas on gender representation. Furthermore, the inclusion of marginalized communities should be among the priorities of social policy.
- b. EU should further financially support media, cultural events etc. that are **promoting diversity** to fight discrimination and racism.
- c. EU should focus more on **raising awareness** around marginalized communities and combat fake information and narratives spreading hate.
- d. The EU should invest more in **supporting lower socio-economic classes and marginalized** communities in order to bridge the existing gaps.
- e. EU needs to do more in order to support **employment opportunities for young** people and empower them in the job market – for example through cooperation between universities and companies, motivating companies to employ graduates without experience (tax incentives), both local or international, and through subsidizing existing pay gaps.
- f. The EU should support **women’s reproductive rights** and right to abortion and issue safe programmes also for women from abroad. The EU should also strive to act as a promoter of these rights on the global stage.
- g. **Taxes** on sanitary and hygiene products have to be removed.
- h. The EU should take lead in developing opportunities for **free childcare** in individual Member States.
- i. Better **sex education** is needed across the EU, including more information on pregnancy and parenthood.
- j. The EU should promote **affordable housing**. Establishing rent caps should be considered, as well as simplification of laws regarding building construction.

About the project

The YouthEU project is supported by the European Commission through the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme (CERV) and aims to address the sources of Euroscepticism among youth (high school and first-time voters) in the most Eurosceptic societies in the EU and among the EU candidate countries. The project also provides an opportunity for experts and policymakers to gain insight into the attitudes of young people towards the EU and European integration while creating a platform through which the youth can discuss and exchange their views of the EU and learn about the European project.

The YouthEU incorporates both top-down and bottom-up approaches to educating and empowering youth on the EU and their role as European citizens through webinars, workshops and engagement with EU stakeholders in Brussels. The project delivered 40 webinars in 4 countries, which engaged more than 800 participants. Out of those, 15 participants were chosen to take part in each of the national rounds. Ultimately, 24 students from 4 participating countries were selected to travel to Brussels for a three-day study trip. During all of the abovementioned activities, students discussed how they perceive the EU and what they consider the biggest challenges to its prosperous future.



Priorities discussed during the national rounds

1. Czechia

- a. *Social security and economy* – students discussed issues of affordable housing, jobs for young people, and equal rights and opportunities
- b. *Green and digitalization* – need to lower emissions and to be more local
- c. *Democracy* – the discussion steered toward the current Russian war in Ukraine and towards the issues of energy security and threats to democracy

2. France

- a. *Education system in the EU* – lack of European citizenship lessons, lack of easy access to family planning centres (sex education lessons)
- b. *EU inclusivity* – equal opportunities for countries
- c. *Immigration* – the need for providing essential things and ensuring better integration
- d. *Minimum wage for Europe* - based on the cost of living in the country
- e. *Criminalizing anti-environment behaviour*

3. Greece

- a. *Euroscepticism* – problems that lead to Euroscepticism (migration, financial crisis – Greece didn't get a proper response, internal conflicts – lack of information that can lead to blaming the EU, misinformation by the media, politicians, conspiracy theories)
- b. *Environmental issues* – more EU resources to fund start-ups
- c. *Education* - informing students about the EU through social media
- d. *Involving new generation* - in policy-making process

4. Serbia

- a. *Pros and cons of Serbia joining NATO* – a difficult topic which did not present a final yes or no statement but produced an excellent debate.
- b. *Environmental problems* – students identified the need for a top-down approach.
- c. *Sanctions on Russia* – yes, but under controlled circumstances.



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