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DAHRENDORF
PROGRAMME
at the
EUROPEAN
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Young Europeans Speak to EU

Edited by Timothy Garton Ash



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Preface

Few questions are more important for the future of the European Union than this: what do young Europeans want it to be and do? Over the last three years, a group of young Europeans at Oxford University has been working with me to find answers to that vital question.

Our team has used a variety of methods. We have conducted some 200 interviews with a wide range of Europeans. A set of carefully designed, simple questions, asking for instance what people regard as their formative, best and worst European moments, and what they most want the EU to do by 2030, produced some fascinating answers. We posed those same questions to leading academics, politicians, journalists and artists, and then dug deeper with each of them into their special fields.

Since this is clearly not a representative sample of Europeans, we complemented this qualitative research with four rounds of opinion polling of a representative sample in the 27 member states of the EU and the UK. We were delighted to do this in partnership with the eupinions polling project of the Bertelsmann Foundation.

Needless to say, we also applied more traditional research methods, such as reviewing the relevant literatures and consulting with leading experts, also in a series of webinars, lectures and a major international conference at Oxford. Our internal debates, enriched by criticism from specialists in relevant fields, further deepened the analysis and sharpened the prescription. Most of this rich material, both qualitative and quantitative, is available on our website *europeanmoments.com*. That is the other major product of this 'Europe's Stories' project of the Dahrendorf Programme at the European Studies Centre, St Antony's College, University of Oxford.

This report starts with an introductory chapter exploring what we mean by 'young Europeans' and what some of their characteristic attitudes and priorities are. There follow thematic chapters on five major areas that emerged as being of the first importance to this generation. In each of these chapters we first describe, on the basis of our own and others' research, what young Europeans want the EU to do. We go on to discuss what the EU is and is not doing in this area. In a concluding section, the authors, all of whom are currently or have recently been graduate students at Oxford,

advance some suggestions of their own as to what the EU should do to meet these expectations. A final chapter looks at synergies and trade-offs between the different areas.

We hope that policymakers, analysts and opinion-formers will find this report of interest and we look forward to hearing the responses of other Europeans, young and old.

Timothy Garton Ash
Oxford, June 2021

What opinion polls tell us

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1. Who Are Young Europeans?

Maeve Moynihan and Dan Snow

The idea of a united Europe is rooted in the aftermath of the Second World War, as a generation who had witnessed bloody conflict vowed to never again let European countries fall into battle against one another. The European project was carried forward by individuals who lived through a period of breath-taking change in Europe as in the world and who watched a new era dawn with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union. The torch will soon pass to a new generation of young Europeans who have never seen Europe divided by war or wall, but who will nonetheless determine the future of the European project. In this section, we offer our definition of this young generation and summarise what they want from the European Union.

In our March 2021 poll, 71% of people responded that they ‘identify as European’, but our qualitative interviews suggest that what defines that European identity varies across generations.¹ We argue that while older generations are united by the collective experience and sense of freedom that dawned in 1989, young Europeans have taken advantage of that freedom and instead find common ground in personal formative experiences of travel and exchange around Europe. Young Europeans treasure this freedom of movement and seek to preserve it. We also find substantial appetite among the young for the EU to act on important issues. There is strong support for climate action, as well as broad support for the EU to uphold rights and democratic freedoms in member states. Our results do not always reflect conflict between different generations—climate action is identified as the main priority by all age groups, demonstrating that consensus can emerge between the generations despite their differing experiences of Europe.

¹ Timothy Garton Ash, Eilidh Macfarlane and Dan Snow, “Europe today and tomorrow: What Europeans want”, *eupinions*, 25 May 2021, <https://eupinions.eu/de/text/europe-today-and-tomorrow-what-europeans-want>.

Defining a generation

Defining a generation is a challenge that can be approached in many ways. Within our original research, both qualitative and quantitative, we use the following three groups: ‘young’ (aged 16-29), ‘middle’ (30-49), and ‘old’ (50-69). In defining generations by age, we sought to explore common experiences, or lack thereof, within specific historical periods while acknowledging that birth in one year versus the next does not necessarily prescribe a generational identity.² We therefore divide the young cohort from the middle-aged cohort approximately by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Aptly referred to as the post-89ers, this generation does not share the experience of watching Eastern and Western Europe unite.

We expect that shared experiences will create long-lasting effects that endure over time within a generation. We anticipate young, middle-aged and old Europeans to have different attitudes and priorities partly because they have different European experiences during their critical ‘coming of age’ or ‘formative’ moments. Such moments, we presume, will differ *between* generations but be similar *within* generations. In demography, this is sometimes referred to as a ‘cohort effect’.³ As demographer Norman Ryder wrote, “The members of a cohort are entitled to participate in only one slice of life, their unique location in the stream of history.”⁴ It is distinct from a ‘period effect’, where attitudes shift across all age groups simultaneously, and distinct from an ‘age effect’, where attitudes change over a person’s lifetime as they age.⁵ These terms fall within what demographers call the Age-Period-Cohort model, which is used loosely throughout this report for describing broad trends in attitudes to the European Union, though we do not seek to employ the model in any precise statistical way.⁶

A new generation united by the freedom of movement

With our original qualitative research, we sought to discover what constituted the unique European formative moment(s) for young Europeans and how these differ from those of middle-aged and older Europeans. We asked some 200 people, born between 1937 and 2003, six main questions in a series of interviews, including the open-ended question: “What was your formative European moment?”. This group of interviewees is by no means a representative sample, and given the self-selecting nature of the group, is likely to over-represent highly educated and pro-EU

² Nor are our cohorts likely to be perfectly homogenous. Though we focus on broad age categories, it should be noted that our ‘young’ age group includes both the ‘Generation Z’ and the ‘millennial’ generations, groups which are likely to have somewhat different experiences of growing up.

³ Ethan Fosse and Christopher Winship, “Bounding Analyses of Age-Period-Cohort Effects”, *Demography*, 56 no. 5 (2019): 1975–2004, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13524-019-00801-6>.

⁴ Norman B. Ryder, “The Cohort as a Concept in the Study of Social Change”, *American Sociological Review* 30, no. 6 (1965): 843–61, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2090964>.

⁵ Fosse and Winship, 2019.

⁶ *Ibid.*

Europeans.⁷ We asked intentionally pan-European questions during our interviews, resulting in answers with a focus on Europe as a whole, rather than specific national particularities.

“For my generation, the Baby Boomers, the fall of the Iron Curtain was a very big thing for us...”

For older Europeans (born before 1972), the fall of the Berlin Wall and the unification of Eastern and Western Europe is omnipresent, with a third of this entire age group selecting 1989 as a formative or best moment. By contrast, only 7% of young Europeans and 19% of middle-aged Europeans listed it as such with a very clear cut-off for those born after 1981. An Austrian composer born in 1960 encapsulated the feeling of that moment: “When the Iron Curtain fell in 1989 [...] you can’t remember how relieved I was [...] in general for my generation [...] the Baby Boomers, the fall of the Iron Curtain was a very big thing for us. This gave us the promise of a new freedom.”⁸ The moment the Wall fell is a defining event in the collective memory of this generation.

Our results suggest that freedom of movement and personal travel is formative for young Europeans in the same way that the fall of the Berlin Wall was formative to older Europeans. Rather than a specific collective historic moment, mobility throughout the EU overwhelmingly defined the formative years of our young European interviewees. Of young interviewees (born after 1991), 39% listed personal travel experiences or Erasmus exchanges as their formative or best moment (compared to 19% of older interviewees and 24% of middle-aged interviewees). A Polish communications consultant born in 1992 shared that “the most important thing that the EU has done for me is giving me the ability to live and work in different countries very easily [...] it opened up so many opportunities for me academically and professionally that wouldn’t have been available to me otherwise.”⁹ Many of these interviewees have little or no memory of 1989, likely explaining its lack of significance for them.¹⁰

Given that many young Europeans view personal travel experiences as their defining European moment, it is unsurprising that our interviewees see freedom of movement and free travel as indispensable aspects of the EU. 43% of our young interviewees independently said that freedom of movement is the “single best thing the EU has done for them personally”. A French lobbyist born in 1995 shared that the “Schengen [Agreement] is one of the biggest achievements of the European Union, especially for

⁷ All EU 27 + UK countries are represented except for: Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Luxembourg, Malta, Sweden. Several ‘EU-proximate’ countries, like Turkey and Ukraine, are also represented.

⁸ Europe’s Stories, “Interview with Karlheinz Essl”, *europeanmoments.com*, 2020, <https://europeanmoments.com/interviewees/karlheinz>.

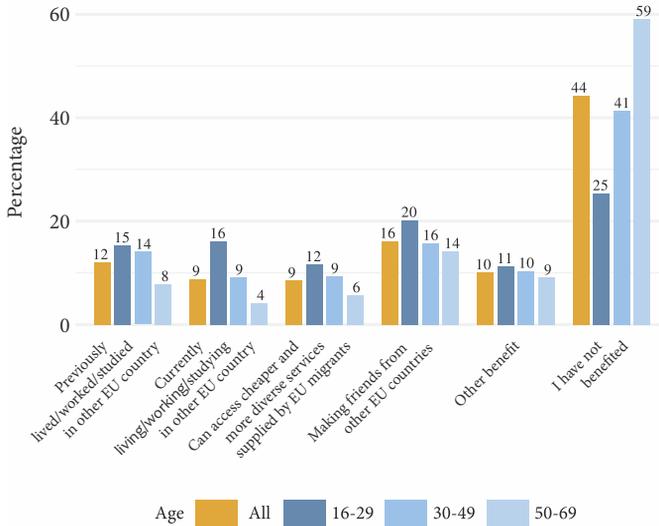
⁹ Europe’s Stories, “Interview with Anthony”, *europeanmoments.com*, 2020, <https://europeanmoments.com/interviewees/anthony>.

¹⁰ Howard Schuman and Jacqueline Scott, “Generations and Collective Memories”, *American Sociological Review* 54, no. 3 (June 1989): 359-81, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2095611>.

Figure 1

Young Europeans much more likely to have personally benefited from freedom of movement

Talking of freedom of movement, which aspect of the European Union have you personally benefited from the most, if you have benefited at all?



Source: eupinions survey, conducted in March 2021

our generation”, referencing free travel specifically.¹¹ Only around one-third of older and middle-aged interviewees referenced free movement as the best thing done for them by the EU, perhaps because of the limited mobility that existed during their formative years, prior to the 1995 establishment of the Schengen Area.

The results of our representative opinion polls of Europeans across all 27 member states and the UK strongly reinforced these findings.¹² The four opinion polls that we fielded revealed that young Europeans see the existence of the EU and the privilege of free movement as inextricably linked. For example, in our December 2020 poll, 76% of young Europeans that we polled stated that “the EU would not be worth having if it did not offer the freedom to travel, work, study and live in other EU member states.”¹³ In our March 2021 poll, only one-fifth of young Europeans claimed to have never personally benefited from freedom of movement in the EU, compared to the 59% of over-50s who said they had not benefited.¹⁴

¹¹ Europe’s Stories, “Interview with Louise Bucaille”, *europeanmoments.com*, 2020, <https://europeanmoments.com/interviewees/louise>.

¹² For further details on our polling sample, please refer to our eupinions reports.

¹³ Timothy Garton Ash, Eilidh Macfarlane and Dan Snow, “What Europeans Want from the European Union”, *eupinions*, 26 Jan 2021, <https://eupinions.eu/de/text/what-europeans-want-from-the-european-union>.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

What do young Europeans want?

Our qualitative interviews confirm the impression of a generational divide between young, middle and old interviewees regarding their formative experiences. While their thoughts surrounding formative experience suggest a more individualistic tendency among young Europeans, we found collective unity among the young, and across generations, in a vision for the future of Europe. Our interview findings strongly reinforce the concern surrounding climate change and the support of freedom of movement. These two foci are somewhat contradictory, as the current ways of achieving freedom of movement often entail a significant cost to the climate. Indeed, our September 2020 poll found that, in an attempt to resolve this tension, 65% of Europeans say they would support a ban on short flights to destinations that could be reached within 12 hours by train.¹⁵ We return to the inherent tension in such ‘trade-offs’ throughout the report.

Contrary to what is often suggested, we believe that the consistent focus on climate action across all European generations may reflect a ‘period effect’ rather than a ‘cohort effect’, with a general rise in climate concern across the whole population. Although the charge against climate change may be driven partly by members of ‘Generation Z’, such as Greta Thunberg, young people are not alone in their concern for the long-term welfare of the planet.

European generations define their formative experiences differently, but they are largely united in their hopes for the future of the EU which focus on climate action, regardless of age. When asked, “What is the one thing you would like the EU to have achieved by 2030”, one-third of our interviewees independently selected climate action. As a German think tank manager born in 1987 put it, “This is easy. It’s the message I’m telling everyone at the moment, which is that we must rise to the challenge on climate. And currently, the European Union is being asked, and the new Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has proposed that European Union adopt not only the goal of becoming climate neutral by 2050 but also increasing its ambition on 2030 to show leadership in global climate negotiations, and we must rise to this challenge.”¹⁶ A Polish events manager born in 1992 hoped the EU would “make significant progress in fighting climate change [...] putting this as a priority for the whole European Union and each country, in particular, that is a part of it”, while a Hungarian script-writer born in 1982 advocated specifically for “zero emissions and zero waste.”¹⁷

**“Show leadership in
global climate
negotiations”**

¹⁵ Timothy Garton Ash, Antonia Zimmermann, Dan Snow and Eilidh Macfarlane, “What Europeans say they will do to combat climate change”, *eupinions*, 20 Nov 2020, <https://eupinions.eu/de/text/what-europeans-say-they-will-do-to-combat-climate-change>.

¹⁶ Europe’s Stories, “Interview with Andreas Graf”, *europeanmoments.com*, 2020, <https://europeanmoments.com/interviewees/andreas>.

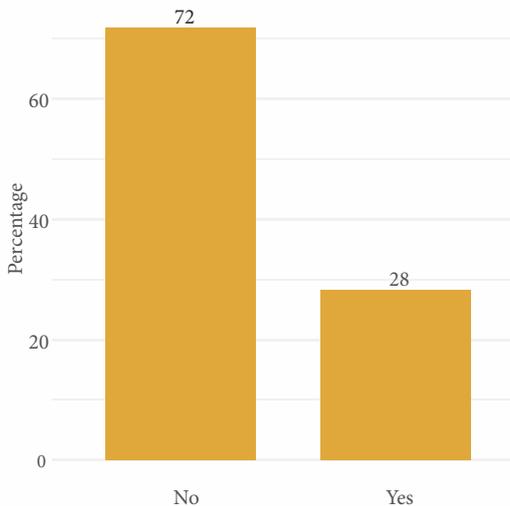
¹⁷ Europe’s Stories, “Interview with Małgorzata Zurowska”, *europeanmoments.com*, 2020, <https://europeanmoments.com/interviewees/malgorzata>; Europe’s Stories, “Interview with Balazs Juszt”, *europeanmoments.com*, 2020, <https://europeanmoments.com/interviewees/balazs>.

Such thoughts echo the results of our September 2020 poll, particularly surrounding views on the EU’s lack of action on climate change.¹⁸ Young Europeans are not alone in their concern about climate action. An April 2021 poll found that young Americans are similarly disenchanting with the U.S. government’s action on climate change.¹⁹

Figure 2

Only three in ten Europeans think the EU is doing enough to combat climate change

Do you think the EU is doing enough to combat climate change?



Source: eupinions survey, conducted in September 2020

Do the young trust the EU to combat climate change?

It is clear that young Europeans see climate change as a serious threat, and think the EU should prioritise climate action even over Covid-19 recovery and other EU policy changes.²⁰ However, our data also suggests that many young Europeans harbour doubts about whether the EU is best equipped to tackle the problem. For example,

¹⁸ Garton Ash *et al.*, 25 May 2021.

¹⁹ Cary Funk, “Key findings: How Americans’ attitudes about climate change differ by generation, party and other factors”, *Pew Research Center*, 26 May 2021, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/05/26/key-findings-how-americans-attitudes-about-climate-change-differ-by-generation-party-and-other-factors/?utm_source=Pew+Research+Center&utm_campaign=cb151d2bd5-Weekly_2021_05_29&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_3e953b9b70-cb151d2bd5-399761565.

²⁰ Directorate-General for Climate Action, Directorate-General for Communication, “Special Eurobarometer 490: Climate Change”, *European Commission*, 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/clima/sites/clima/files/support/docs/report_2019_en.pdf; Catherine E. de Vries and Isabell Hoffmann, “Great expectations”, *eupinions*, 27 Nov 2019, <https://eupinions.eu/de/text/great-expectations>; Friends of Europe, “More Europeans prioritise the environment than prioritise the COVID-19 economic recovery”, *friendsofeurope.org*, 12 Oct 2020, <https://www.friendsofeurope.org/insights/new-poll-more-europeans-prioritise-the-environment-than-prioritise-the-covid-19-economic-recovery/>.

our March 2020 polling results reveal that an astonishing 53% of young Europeans agree that authoritarian regimes are more equipped than democracies to manage the climate crisis, a finding that would be worth revisiting in the future wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.²¹ And while young people generally have a favourable view of the EU and support democracy, they are divided as to what should be the responsibilities of national versus EU governments.²² Increasing Eurosceptic voting patterns among young people, in France and Italy particularly, also challenge the conventional notion of pro-EU sentiments among young Europeans and suggest growing scepticism of democracy among some young Europeans.²³ If the European project aims to speak and act for the next generation, it must work towards better action on climate change, a key policy priority of Europeans, alongside other important issues including jobs, social security and fighting terrorism.²⁴

A Generation C?

Our report suggests that young Europeans are united more by the experience of free movement than by a single ‘formative moment’, but we may be currently living through just such a moment. The Covid-19 pandemic has directly impacted all Europeans, with wide-reaching consequences for all citizens but the young in particular have sacrificed much by way of personal liberty and economic security to protect the older generations that are far more at risk from the virus. Alongside an age-structured distribution of the Covid-19 vaccine, this may lead to a sense of pride among the young in their collective sacrifice, or it may instead lead to resentment.²⁵ At our webinar on defining historical generations in Europe, demographer Jennifer Dowd suggested that “young adults obviously have been so impacted by the unemployment and also the social isolation aspect of [Covid-19] [...] delaying dating and marriage and all sorts of knock-on effects from that. So, I think Covid is going to

²¹ Timothy Garton Ash and Antonia Zimmermann, “In Crisis, Europeans Support Radical Positions”, *eupinions*, 6 May 2020, <https://eupinions.eu/de/text/in-crisis-europeans-support-radical-positions>.

²² Laura Silver, Moira Fagan and Nicholas Kent, “Majorities in the European Union Have Favorable Views of the Bloc”, Pew Research Center, 17 Nov 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/11/17/majorities-in-the-european-union-have-favorable-views-of-the-bloc/>; Dániel Bartha, Tamás Boros, Maria Freitas, Gergely Lakir and Meghan Stringer, “What is the European Dream? Survey on European Dreams for the Future of Europe”, *Foundation for European Progressive Studies*, March 2020, https://www.fepe-europe.eu/attachments/publications/ed_web.pdf.

²³ Fabian Lauterbach and Catherine E. de Vries, “Europe Belongs to the Young? Generational Differences in Public Opinion towards the European Union during the Eurozone Crisis”, *Journal of European Public Policy* 27, no. 2 (2020): 168–87, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2019.1701533>; R.S. Foa, A. Klassen, M. Slade, A. Rand, and R. Collins, “The Global Satisfaction with Democracy Report 2020”, Cambridge, United Kingdom: *Centre for the Future of Democracy*, 2020, <https://www.bennettinstitute.cam.ac.uk/publications/global-satisfaction-democracy-report-2020/>.

²⁴ Catherine E. de Vries and Isabell Hoffmann, “The Hopeful, the Fearful and the Furious”, *eupinions.eu*, 3 Apr 2019, <https://eupinions.eu/de/text/the-hopeful-the-fearful-and-the-furious>; de Vries and Hoffmann, “Great expectations”, 2019.

²⁵ For further reflection on this topic, see our February 2021 webinar Europe’s Stories, “‘68ers, ‘89ers, & post-89ers: What are the key historical generations in contemporary Europe?”, *europeanmoments.com*, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qz3t0PiTYE8>.

“I think Covid is going to be one of those huge events that has very different impacts across cohorts...”

be one of those huge events that has very different impacts across cohorts and to see how that plays out over the long run will be interesting.”²⁶ Despite its global nature, the pandemic has also been something of a ‘European moment’ for European citizens, with a disproportionate number of deaths in southern states like Spain and Italy that only recently suffered in the Eurozone crisis, and an EU vaccine rollout that has been anything but smooth. Indeed, our March 2021 poll found that 45% of Europeans believe that the vaccine rollout has been handled badly.²⁷

Some Europeans argue that the EU’s response has undermined its credibility. A British teacher born in 1965 said that it was a “failure of European leadership”, and an Armenian interviewee born in 1991 listed Covid-19 as the worst European moment, “as it’s a real challenge for the European Union to prove its credibility and ability to manage the current crisis in Europe”.²⁸ Others see a silver lining, arguing that it has demonstrated the capability and solidarity of the EU despite the shortcomings. A Portuguese law professor listed it as the best European moment and shared that, “With all the difficulties, with all the time delay, the answer that the European Union has been able to provide to the pandemic, it has managed to provide vaccines and to support its member states in acquiring vaccines, and to do it in a way that is fair, balanced, and equal to all the member states.”²⁹

Such remarks echo our December 2020 opinion poll findings which suggest that young Europeans care more about outcomes of the EU than they do about the procedures used to achieve them.³⁰ This focus on ‘performance legitimacy’ suggests that the EU gains credibility in the eyes of young Europeans by providing positive benefits, such as vaccination, more so than it does in justifying the procedures used to achieve such outcomes. The Covid-19 pandemic is yet to conclude, leaving it uncertain at present whether it will define a generation. Will the pandemic curtail the freedom of movement as member state economies recover and ‘vaccine passports’ take hold? Or will the post-pandemic world look more united and progressive than

²⁶ Europe’s Stories, “’68ers, ’89ers, & post-89ers: What are the key historical generations in contemporary Europe?”

²⁷ Lauterbach and de Vries, 2020; Garton Ash *et al.*, 25 May 2021; Matina Stevis-Gridneff and Monika Pronczuk, “Worry Over 2 Covid Vaccines Deals Fresh Blow to Europe’s Inoculation Push”, *The New York Times*, 13 April 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/13/world/europe/covid-vaccines-astrazeneca-johnson-johnson.html>.

²⁸ Europe’s Stories, “Interview with Ani Khachatryan”, *europeanmoments.com*, 2020, <https://europeanmoments.com/interviewees/ani>; Europe’s Stories, “Interview with Richard Stevens”, *europeanmoments.com*, 2021, <https://europeanmoments.com/interviewees/richard>.

²⁹ Europe’s Stories, “Interview with Miguel Poiares Maduro”, *europeanmoments.com*, 2021, <https://europeanmoments.com/stories/miguel-poiaraes-maduro>.

³⁰ Garton Ash *et al.*, 26 Jan 2021.

before as Europeans consider healthcare and social services more closely? As a British interviewee born in 1989 noted, “right now the pandemic is one of the worst moments in Europe, but how history will remember this is still uncertain”.³¹

Though Covid-19 has eclipsed several other policy areas during the past year, young Europeans have not lost sight of their priorities. This report explores those priorities, and the trade-offs they require, to understand how young people will shape the future of Europe. What are young Europeans willing to sacrifice

**“How history will
remember this is
still uncertain”**

to combat climate change? Does preserving freedom of movement for Europeans require restricting it for others? Who should bear the primary responsibility for the preservation of democracy? Could Europe adopt a Universal Basic Income or mandatory minimum wage? Only by offering answers to questions like these can we begin to paint a picture of Europe as it is seen through the eyes of the young.

³¹ Europe’s Stories, “Interview with (name withheld)”, *europeanmoments.com*, 2020, <https://europeanmoments.com/interviewees/anonymousengland>.

2. Free Movement

Luisa Melloh and Achille Versaevel

What young Europeans want EUrope to do

At first sight, the relationship between Europeans and their right to free movement appears straightforward. As laid out in the previous chapter, Europeans support free movement within the European Union, be it for themselves or for others. Broadly speaking, they are equally supportive of the right to settle in other countries within the European Union as they are of the right to cross borders unimpeded within the Schengen Area. Young Europeans are even more likely than older generations to express these views.

“That is probably the most wonderful thing that Europe has to offer to its own citizens”

From our 200 qualitative interviews, free movement emerges as the strongest benefit attributed to the EU. When asked about the single most important thing the EU had done for them, an overwhelming 42% of all interviewees cited free movement, like this Romanian researcher born in 1981:

“For me personally I think it is the ability to study, work, live in various parts of Europe, to have a more diverse understanding of what Europe is. That is probably the most wonderful thing that Europe has to offer to its own citizens [...]. I am extremely glad that this came in my life when I could take advantage of it.”³²

Similarly, free travel was the most commonly named formative European moment (16% of all interviewees).³³ A French consultant born in 1994, describes it as follows:

³² Europe’s Stories, “Interview with Stefan Cibian”, *europeanmoments.com*, 2020, <https://europeanmoments.com/interviewees/stefan>.

³³ In this chapter, ‘free movement’ refers to the right of EU citizens to settle in the EU member state of their choice, whereas ‘free travel’ refers to the right to cross borders without undergoing border checks within the Schengen Area.

“I think it’s something wonderful for us Europeans to be able to travel everywhere [...]. There is no bureaucracy, you don’t have administrative problems to travel around and also to work abroad. It’s really easy for us and something very rich for all of us to go and learn abroad from other cultures, to go and visit other countries, to understand why this space exists, what history it has, especially because of all the wars that happened in Europe, and now it’s really different, and it’s a continent that’s really at peace.”³⁴

These observations derived from our interviews are no surprise. Our December 2020 opinion polling showed that half of all Europeans view opportunities to work and study abroad as one of the three most important things the EU has done for them personally.³⁵ Further, Eurobarometer surveys have confirmed repeatedly that the vast majority (84%) of EU citizens support the “free movement of EU citizens who can live, work, study and do business anywhere in the EU”.³⁶

**“There is no
bureaucracy, you
don’t have
administrative
problems to travel
around and also to
work abroad”**

Europeans also value their right to travel unimpededly within the Schengen Area. According to our December 2020 polling, 61% of all European citizens view the right to cross borders within the Schengen Area without undergoing any border checks as one of the three most important things the EU has done for them personally.³⁷ The same proportion agrees that “the Schengen Area has more advantages than disadvantages for them personally.”³⁸ Combined with the finding from our December 2020 polling that nearly three-

quarters of Europeans agree that “the EU would not be worth having if it didn’t offer freedom to travel, work and study in other EU member states”, we find that the fundamental legitimacy of the EU is closely intertwined with the rights to free travel and to free movement.³⁹ Further, our December 2020 polling shows the widespread popularity of borderless travel across all age groups, with Europeans aged 15-29 only

³⁴ Europe’s Stories, “Interview with François d’Andigné”, *europeanmoments.com*, 2020, <https://europeanmoments.com/interviewees/francois>.

³⁵ Garton Ash *et al.*, 26 Jan 2021.

³⁶ Directorate-General for Communication, “Standard Eurobarometer 93: Europeans’ opinions about the European Union’s priorities”, *European Commission*, Summer 2020, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2262>.

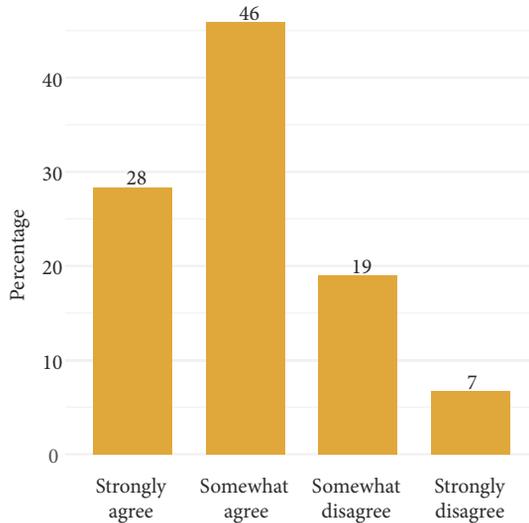
³⁷ Garton Ash *et al.*, 26 Jan 2021.

³⁸ Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, “Special Eurobarometer 747: The Schengen Area”, *European Commission*, Dec 2018, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/26ce02a6-e890-11e8-b690-01aa75ed71a1>.

³⁹ Garton Ash *et al.*, 26 Jan 2021. See also: Marie De Somer, “Schengen: Quo Vadis?”, *European Journal of Migration and Law* 22, no. 2 (2020): 178-197.

Figure 3**Nearly three-quarters of Europeans agree that the EU would not be worth having without freedom of movement**

If it did not offer the freedom to travel, work, study and live in other EU member states, the European Union would not be worth having



Source: eupinions survey, conducted in December 2020

slightly more likely to mention free travel as one of the top three things the EU has done for them personally (64% compared to 61% overall).⁴⁰ A quarter of all European citizens also mention the abolition of roaming charges when communicating from abroad as one of the three most important things the EU has done for them personally, which suggests that they have availed themselves of the opportunity to travel within the European Union on a short-term basis.⁴¹

Regarding the right of EU citizens to settle anywhere in the EU, our December 2020 polling showed that 58% of young Europeans chose ‘opportunities to live, work and study abroad’ as one of the top three things the EU has done for them personally, compared to 50.5% of those aged 55+.⁴² This is confirmed by Eurobarometer polls that found that 89% of European citizens aged between 15-24 support the right of EU citizens to settle anywhere in the EU, up 6 percentage points compared to those over the age of 55.⁴³ This small but significant difference likely reflects the majority of students and apprentices in the younger age bracket and their access to EU programmes such as Erasmus, the European Solidarity Corps or the DiscoverEU

⁴⁰ Garton Ash *et al.*, 26 Jan 2021.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, “Standard Eurobarometer 93: Europeans’ opinions about the European Union’s priorities”, 2020.

scheme. The impact these programmes have had on young people is captured by a Polish secondary school student born in 2001:

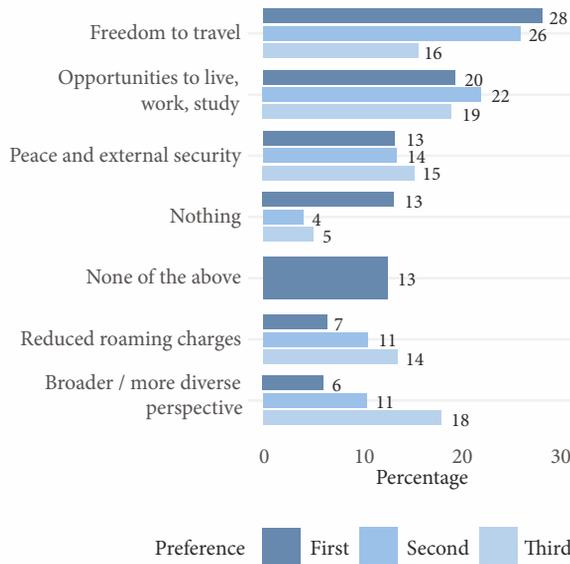
“Recently, I was travel[ing], thanks to European Union programme ‘DiscoverEU’, and I visited a lot of museums and I saw the art and how similar the art was [...]. Art says a lot about a society, so we had very similar problems in [our] countries: wars about religion and wars about independence and I think that when I saw that, I definitely saw myself as European.”⁴⁴

Figure 4

Freedom to travel is the most chosen top personal benefit of EU membership

Of the following, what are the most important things the EU has done for you personally?

Rank top three in order of importance



Source: eupinions survey, conducted in December 2020

According to the same survey, younger Europeans are also more likely than older generations to hold positive views on the immigration of people from other EU member states into their home country.⁴⁵ 78% of those aged 15–24 hold such positive views, compared to 63% of those aged 55 or over. More specifically, when asked whether they are for or against the right of EU citizens to live in other EU countries, a large majority of 15-29-year-olds express their support (81%, compared to 73% overall and 69% of those aged 55 or older).⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Europe’s Stories, “Interview with Maria Pancewicz”, *europeanmoments.com*, 2020, <https://europeanmoments.com/interviewees/maria>.

⁴⁵ Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, “Standard Eurobarometer 93: Europeans’ opinions about the European Union’s priorities”, 2020.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Delving deeper, however, it appears that the relationship between Europeans and their right to move freely within the European Union is more complicated than one might think from the polls above. Europeans are generally unaware of the difference between free travel and free movement, and few make use of their right to move freely within Europe, be it temporarily or to settle in a new country. As a Hungarian communications officer born in 1990, put it:

“I think most people do not know what it means to be waiting in a long queue just to get to the other side of a border until they personally experience it. So, the fact that I can move freely, travel freely, and work freely is a true European gift.”⁴⁷

Although they greatly value free movement, European citizens have a limited understanding of what it involves. For our interviewees, the ability to travel freely without having to undergo border controls seems to go hand in hand with their exclusive right as EU citizens to work, settle and live in any other EU country, even though these two rights are clearly distinct from a legal point of view. For instance, a young cohesion policy expert and economist from Hungary told us that the most important thing the EU had done for him personally was “free movement [...] travelling without a passport. I think it’s a common answer but it’s because it’s very popular, very useful, one of the biggest aims in our common European history.”⁴⁸

“The fact that I can move freely, travel freely, and work freely is a true European gift”

Talking about the Schengen Area more specifically, fewer than one in two European citizens know what the Schengen Area is. One in three have never heard of it.⁴⁹ Among those who declare knowing what the Schengen Area is, many do not know whether their country belongs to it (18%) or believe that it is easier to travel outside the Schengen Area than within it (27%). Young Europeans are even less likely than older generations to be aware of the Schengen Area. This may be because most young Europeans were not even born when the original Schengen Agreement was signed in 1985. Hence, it is less surprising that only 30% of European citizens aged between 15 and 24 declare being aware of the existence of the Schengen Area, as opposed to 50% among those aged 25-39 and 52% among those aged 40-54.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Europe’s Stories, “Interview with Diana Zsoldos”, *europeanmoments.com*, 2020, <https://europeanmoments.com/interviewees/diana>.

⁴⁸ Europe’s Stories, “Interview with János Kele”, *europeanmoments.com*, 2020, <https://europeanmoments.com/interviewees/janos>.

⁴⁹ Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, “Special Eurobarometer 747: The Schengen Area”, 2018.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

Further, surprisingly few European citizens make use of their right to cross borders for temporary sojourns abroad. In 2018, a Eurobarometer survey found that two in five Europeans had never travelled to other countries within the EU.⁵¹ This observation was even more striking in eight EU member states (Greece, Romania, Italy, Portugal, Hungary, Bulgaria, Spain and Poland), where the majority of residents had never entered another EU member state. Among those who travel within the European Union, a tiny minority of 4% would cross an intra-EU border at least once a month, whereas 21% would cross one less than once a year.⁵²

When it comes to permanent settlement, only 3.9% of all those who were born in one of the 27 EU member states had settled in another EU member state as of 2019. This figure is similar to the world's average of 3.5%. In six member states (Malta, France, Ireland, Spain, Sweden, and Denmark), permanent intra-EU emigration levels are below 2%, while over 10% of those who were born in Croatia, Romania and Luxembourg are now living in another EU member state.⁵³

While Europeans highly value freedom of movement in principle, many do not directly benefit from this right. In our own opinion poll conducted in March 2021, 44% of Europeans stated that they had not personally benefited from free movement.⁵⁴ Responses to this question revealed a large age difference: only 25% of young Europeans (aged 16-29) disclosed not having benefited from free movement, compared to 59% of those aged 55 or above. In many cases, it is easier for young people to be mobile: they are more likely to be undertaking studies or apprenticeships and are less likely to have set familial and financial commitments, which would make settling in another EU country more complex. In addition to these age-related opportunities, it is now (unless in times of Covid-19) much easier to settle in other European countries than it was when those now aged 55 or over were young. In addition to the most dramatic changes that are the fall of the Berlin Wall and the creation of the Schengen Area, modes of transport between European countries are now much faster and more affordable, offsetting some of the personal costs of relocating abroad.

While the large majority of Europeans value free movement for themselves and others on an individual basis, at country level, they are much more divided on whether free movement has more benefits or costs for their country. Our March 2021 polling revealed that 37% of Europeans thought free movement had more costs than benefits for their country, while only 32% felt that the benefits outweighed the costs.⁵⁵ While 45% of French respondents thought there were more costs than benefits to free movement for France, only 28% of Poles agreed with that statement.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

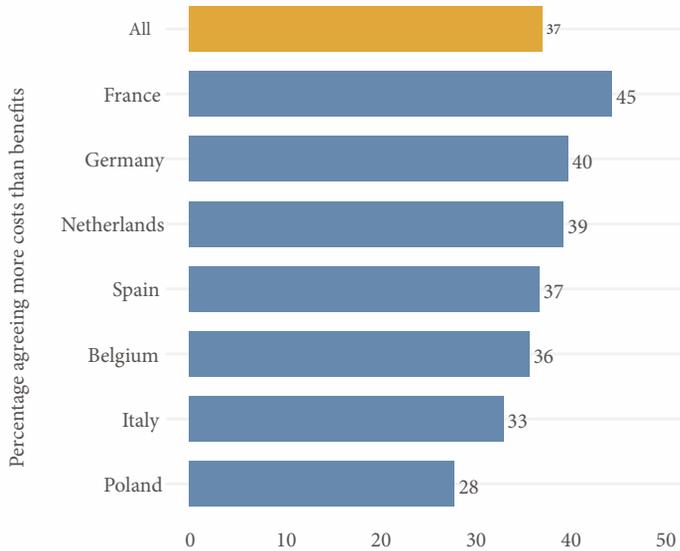
⁵³ UNDP, 2020, "International migrant stock" database, available at <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates19.asp> and World Bank, 2020, "Population, total" database, available at <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL>.

⁵⁴ Garton Ash *et al.*, 25 May 2021.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

Figure 5**Almost half of French respondents agree that freedom of movement has had more costs than benefits for France**

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? "Freedom of movement has had more costs than benefits for my country"



Source: *eupinions* survey, conducted in March 2021

Finally, when asked about EU external border management in our March 2021 polling, nearly two-thirds of Europeans (65%) agree that to have free movement internally, the EU must have well-guarded external borders.⁵⁶ This confirms earlier findings showing that 68% of all Europeans favour a reinforcement of EU external borders with more European border guards and coastguards.⁵⁷ As can be seen in Figure 4, young Europeans are slightly more divided than their parents on this matter. Our March 2021 polling found that only 55% of young Europeans aged between 16 and 29 think that well-guarded borders are a prerequisite to free movement within the European Union, which reflects earlier findings showing that 58% of Europeans aged 15-24 support the reinforcement of EU external borders.⁵⁸

Cooperation among EU member states on border management, however, does not necessarily mean restrictive immigration policies. A majority (54%) of young Europeans view the immigration of people from outside the EU positively. In particular, 73% of young Europeans believe that their country should help refugees.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Directorate-General for Communication, "Standard Eurobarometer 92: Public opinion in the European Union", *European Commission*, Autumn 2019, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2255>.

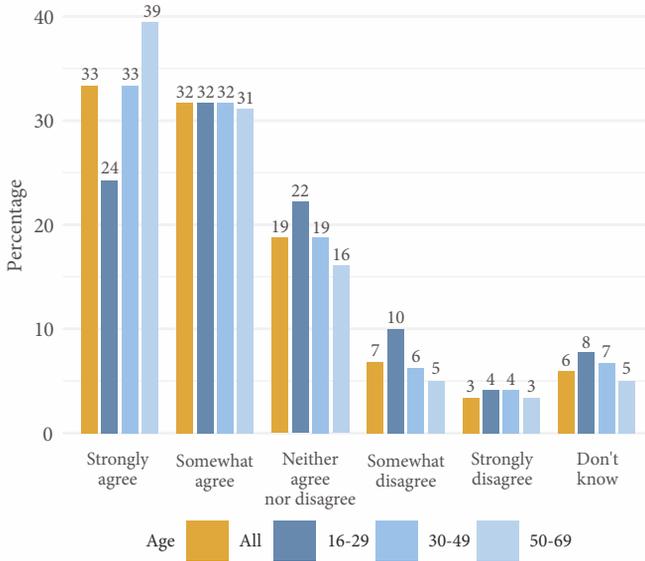
⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, "Standard Eurobarometer 93: Europeans' opinions about the European Union's priorities", 2020.

Figure 6

Fewer young Europeans believe the EU requires a well-guarded external border than older Europeans

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? “To ensure freedom of movement inside the European Union, the EU must have a well-guarded external border”



Source: eupinions survey, conducted in March 2021

According to our March 2021 polling, only 25% of Europeans aged between 16 and 29 believe that the top priority of Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, should be to prevent unlawful entries into the European Union.⁶⁰ In contrast, younger and older Europeans are united in the belief that the top priority of European border guards should be the fight against cross-border crime and terrorism. 17% of the population even consider the top priority of European border guards to be the safety of those attempting to enter the European Union, with one quarter of young Europeans sharing this opinion.⁶¹

“I think one really, really important issue that needs to be solved by 2030—but I’d rather have it solved by next year or tomorrow, if we could—is a humane asylum and migration system, because I think it’s a shame that people are still dying every single day in the Mediterranean sea...it’s a big EU failure...and we not only fail those people who are in need, but we also fail each other...there is no solidarity.”⁶²

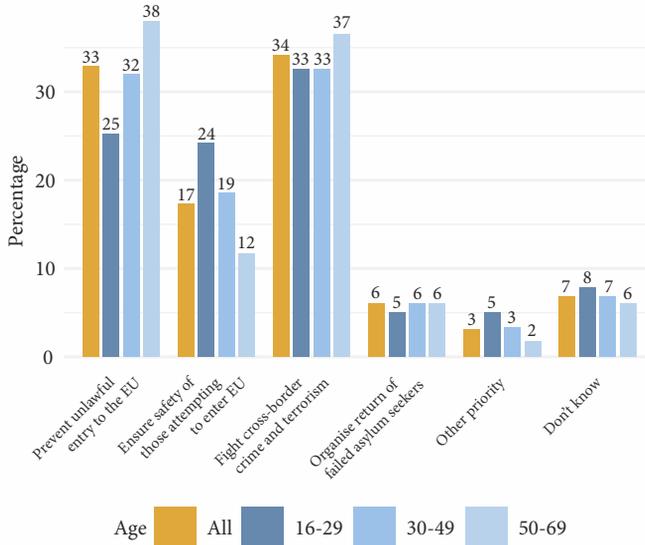
⁶⁰ Garton Ash *et al.*, 25 May 2021.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Europe’s Stories, “Interview with Lilly Schreiter”, *europeanmoments.com*, 2020, <https://europeanmoments.com/interviewees/lilly>.

Figure 7**Europeans want EU border guards to prevent unlawful entry and fight cross-border crime**

The European Union is currently recruiting 10,000 European border guards to be deployed at the external borders of the European Union by 2027. In your opinion, what should be their top priority?



Source: eupinions survey, conducted in March 2021

Opinions like the above one by a German master's student born in 1996 were likely influenced by the 2015 'refugee crisis,' mentioned by several of our interviewees as the worst moment in recent European history. An Italian business development coordinator, stated that "[t]his crisis brought to light many structural weaknesses within the European system. It was not able to manage the crisis."⁶³ Like a student from Austria born in 1995, who acknowledges that "you don't feel at home [anywhere in the EU] if you don't have the rights", several of our interviewees expressed the wish for the EU to step up its solidarity with member states at the fringes of Europe and expand the full rights of free EU movement to newcomers from third countries.⁶⁴

What the EU is and is not doing

Public opinion on free movement directly corresponds to the actions of the European Union and its predecessors. Europeans greatly value free movement, a policy that European governments have been developing for over seven decades. In turn, Europeans show an appetite for well-guarded external borders, which has been the focus of European efforts in recent years.

⁶³ Europe's Stories, "Interview with Matilde Bottazzoli", *europeanmoments.com*, 2020, <https://europeanmoments.com/interviewees/matilde>.

⁶⁴ Europe's Stories, "Interview with Evelyn Shi", *europeanmoments.com*, 2020, <https://europeanmoments.com/interviewees/evelyn>.

“This crisis brought to light many structural weaknesses within the European system”

The right to free movement for EU citizens has been an *enduring* commitment of the EU and its predecessors. As early as 1957, the Treaty of Rome first introduced the freedom for workers to settle anywhere within the Community to seek employment. At that stage, free movement for workers was

conceived as a means towards the achievement of a greater end: a common market. As the European Economic Community was being established, it was necessary to ensure that labour, as a means of production, could move freely within the community.

It was only a decade later, in 1968, that family members of workers were also allowed to move freely within the European Economic Community.⁶⁵ Another 22 years later, the European Council adopted three directives expanding the right to free movement to all the citizens of member states, provided they have sufficient resources to sustain themselves and have secured health insurance.⁶⁶

Progressively moving away from the original economic conception of the right to free movement, the 1992 Maastricht Treaty first recognised the unconditional right of all citizens of member states to settle permanently in any member state, regardless of their occupation status.⁶⁷ In a final move towards the recognition of free movement as an individual freedom, Article 45 of the 2002 EU Charter of Fundamental Rights provides that “every citizen of the Union has the right to move and reside freely within the territory of the member states.” In accordance with this new conception of free movement, the European Parliament and Council lifted the provisions that required those who moved within the European Union to have sufficient resources and health insurance, an exception being made for inactive citizens.⁶⁸

As a significant addition to the right of EU citizens to settle in other member states, European governments facilitated the mobility of its people by adopting the 1985 Schengen Agreement and the subsequent 1990 Schengen Convention, thereby creating a single jurisdiction for international travel purposes. This meant, in practice, the abolition of internal borders among the contracting parties and the adoption of a single entry visa policy with regards to third country nationals. From five original signatories in 1985, the Schengen Area now counts 26 European countries, 22 of which belong to the European Union. Nationals of all parties can, under normal circumstances, cross internal borders without undergoing any checks.

⁶⁵ Regulation (EEC) No 1612/68 of the Council of 15 October 1968 on freedom of movement for workers within the Community, now replaced by Regulation (EU) No 492/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 April 2011 on freedom of movement for workers within the Union.

⁶⁶ Council Directive 90/364/EEC of 28 June 1990 on the right of residence, Council Directive 90/365/EEC of 28 June 1990 on the right of residence for employees and self-employed persons who have ceased their occupational activity, and Council Directive 90/366/EEC of 28 June 1990 on the right of residence for students.

⁶⁷ Article 21 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

⁶⁸ Directive 2004/38/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2004 on the right of citizens of the Union and their family members to move and reside freely within the territory of the member states.

One must differentiate between the right to freely cross borders within the Schengen Area and the right of EU citizens to settle in other countries. For instance, nationals from Schengen countries can enter Switzerland unimpeded but need to obtain a residence permit if they intend to settle. In turn, EU nationals can settle in Bulgaria, but will face border controls. The Schengen Area has equivalents worldwide, such as the ECOWAS area in Western Africa or the Commonwealth of Independent States in Central Asia. The right to free movement for EU citizens, on the contrary, is unrivalled.

While the right to freely cross borders within the Schengen Area and the right of EU citizens to settle in any EU country are distinct, they reinforce one another. Settling in another country than the one of your birth is inevitably easier if you can seamlessly travel back and forth between your country of origin and your country of settlement. To that extent, the Schengen Area is part of countless administrative barriers faced by those who exercise their right to settle in a new country, ranging from the transferability of pensions rights to the recognition of professional qualifications. Every year, the Euro Direct Contact Centre receives many thousands of queries by EU citizens highlighting outstanding administrative barriers to free movement.⁶⁹ Taking these queries into account, the European Parliament and Council have agreed on a wide range of policies that aim to remove barriers to free movement within the EU. The 2010 EU Citizenship report flagged 25 issues faced by mobile EU citizens, including issues related to the recognition and access of civil status documents or taxation problems when registering cars.⁷⁰ As a result, it seems fair to conclude that free movement has now become an end in itself: enormous efforts are being put in to achieve it. Tellingly, 59% of all Europeans consider the right to free movement as one of the two greatest achievements of the European Union.⁷¹

Freedom of movement is a right that the EU distributes, and which favours a selection of privileged individuals only. The full right to free movement can only be enjoyed by Europeans who hold the *citizenship* of a member state of the EU, and hence European citizenship. The extent to which EU *residents* can enjoy certain aspects of free movement is governed by national legislation and depends on how long a person has been resident in an EU member state and whether they fulfil a set of nationally defined preconditions, such as proof of sufficient income, valid insurance and ‘level of integration’ in the host community.⁷² On a spectrum of high to low access to aspects of free movement, third country nationals who are long-term residents in an EU member state, highly skilled workers, researchers and

⁶⁹ Directorate-General for Communication, “Europe Direct Contact Centre: Annual Activity Report 2019”, *European Commission*, 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/edcc_annual_activity_report_2019.pdf.

⁷⁰ European Commission, “EU citizenship report 2010: Dismantling the obstacles to EU citizens’ rights”, *European Commission*, 2010, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:0603:FIN:EN:PDF>.

⁷¹ Directorate-General for Communication, “Standard Eurobarometer 93: European citizenship”, *European Commission*, Summer 2020, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2262>.

⁷² Justyna Bazylewska-Nagler, “Free-Movement Rights of Third Country Nationals in the EU Internal Market”, *Wroclaw Review of Law, Administration & Economics* 8, no.1, 2019: 27-43, <https://doi.org/10.1515/wrlae-2018-0022>.

students are at the top end.⁷³ This means that if a third country national of one of these groups wishes to move to another EU member state than the one they are currently residing in for more than three months, they have to apply for a new residency permit in that second state. Moving down the spectrum, there are no EU legislative provisions for third country nationals who do not belong to any of the four groups mentioned. Their immigration to an EU member state is governed by national legislation and there are no provisions at EU level that grant them access to anything resembling free movement. At the bottom end of the spectrum are those who cannot even enjoy free movement in the member state they are residing in, such as asylum seekers, who are required to stay within city boundaries while awaiting the outcome of their asylum application.⁷⁴

The shared management of the external borders of the European Union is widely understood as the “necessary corollary to the free movement of persons within the European Union.”⁷⁵ The abolition of borders within the Schengen Area means that, theoretically, anyone who crosses the external border can then circulate freely across countries without undergoing further border checks. For instance, someone entering the Schengen Area by crossing the land border between Poland and Ukraine can reach as far as Portugal unimpeded. With the 1985 Schengen Agreement was born the paradox of “Fortress Europe”, a mixture of freedom and security that led to the establishment of Europol in 1994 and of Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, in 2004. The European Parliament and Council deemed it unfair to leave some countries to manage their own segments of the external land border of the Schengen Area (in the example above, Poland) if such management benefited all other countries, including those not guarding any segment of external land border (in the example above, Portugal). Additionally, the European Parliament and Council established Frontex to make sure that Member States could trust and oversee one another in the management of external borders, especially in the context of the enlargement of the EU to ten new Member States in 2004. Indeed, “the Schengen Area’s external border is only as strong as its weakest link”, so it is in the interest of every member state that borders are managed according to shared standards.⁷⁶

⁷³ European Commission, “Migration and Home Affairs, EMN Glossary: right to free movement”, 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/glossary_search/right-free-movement_en#:~:text=Whilst%20third%2Dcountry%20nationals%20who,are%20covered%20by%20specific%20legal.

⁷⁴ IvAF-Netzwerk BLEIBdran. Berufliche Perspektiven für Flüchtlinge in Thüringen, “Residenzpflicht, Wohnsitzauflage, Wohnsitzregelung”, May 2020, https://www.fluechtlingsrat-thr.de/sites/fluechtlingsrat/files/pdf/Projekte/202005Residenzpflicht_Wohnsitzauflage_Wohnsitzregelung.pdf.

⁷⁵ Council Regulation (EC) No 2007/2004 of 26 October 2004 establishing a European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union; Regulation (EU) 2016/1624 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 September 2016 on the European Border and Coast Guard; and Regulation (EU) 2019/1896 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 November 2019 on the European Border and Coast Guard.

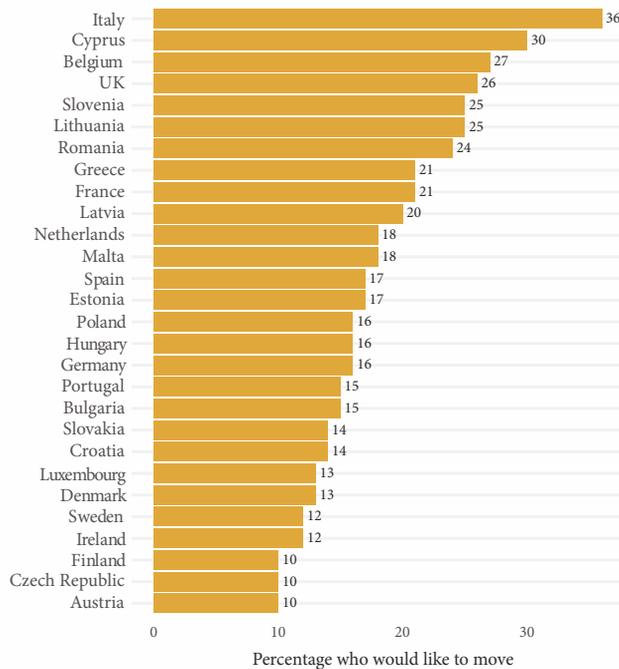
⁷⁶ Frontex, “Roles & Responsibilities”, *Frontex*, 2021, <https://frontex.europa.eu/we-support/roles-responsibilities/>.

Originally established as a platform for the monitoring of the situation at the external borders of the European Union, Frontex is now a prominent agency. In accordance with its mandate adopted in late 2019, Frontex is set to become the second largest body of the European Union by 2027. The agency is now purchasing its own assets and recruiting a 10,000-strong Standing Corps, the EU's first uniformed and armed law enforcement service. In line with its new mandate, Frontex is also now operating outside the European Union and developing the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) and the Entry-Exit System (EES) that will track all non-EU citizens' entry into and exit out of the Schengen Area. After a period during which efforts of the European Union were directed towards the abolition of all sorts of barriers to the free circulation of EU nationals in Europe, the past 15 years have mostly been dedicated to the reinforcement of cooperation among member states at the external borders of the European Union. This trend has reached its peak with the heralding of Frontex as a major actor in border management in Europe, and the development of the agency will remain at the heart of debates on European integration at least until it reaches its full capacity in 2027.

Figure 8

Migration aspirations by EU member state in 2017

Ideally, if you had the opportunity, would you like to move PERMANENTLY to another country, or would you prefer to continue living in this country?



Source: Graph produced using data from Gallup 2021.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Gallup World Poll, "Move permanently to another country", *World Poll Survey*, 2021, aggregate values.

While it is assumed that European citizens can now circulate freely within the bloc and while minds are focused on external borders, a large majority of the EU population remains immobile. According to a 2017 survey, 21% of all European citizens declare that “ideally, if [they] had the opportunity”, they “would like to move permanently to another country.”⁷⁸ This represents one of the highest values worldwide, the world’s average sitting at 15% as of 2017. This percentage also exceeds 2017 values from comparable states such as Russia (17%), the US (16%), Australia (11%) and Canada (10%).⁷⁹ The 21% of European citizens aspiring to migrate represented over 100 million people across the then 28 member states of the European Union. Italy was the country where migration aspirations were highest, with an estimated 36% of migration aspirants among the Italian population, followed by Cyprus (30%) and Belgium (27%). At the other extreme, only 10% of the Austrian, Finnish, and Czech populations aspired to migrate as of 2017.⁸⁰

The proportion of young Europeans who aspire to migrate is particularly high. According to this same survey, a third of all European citizens aged between 15 and 29 would like to change their country of residence. This is a much higher proportion than for those aged 30 to 49 (23%) and for those aged over 50 (13%). Undeniably, European youth drives migration aspirations in the EU. These observations suggest a strong age effect in aspirations to migrate. Across the world, young people are more likely to want to migrate, and Europeans are no exception.⁸¹ High migration aspirations among young Europeans do not seem to evidently result from their entitlement to migrate, even if just within the EU. The unavailability of data prior to 2007, however, makes it difficult to assess whether efforts to facilitate migration within the European Union could have resulted in a period effect that could have explained, at least in part, high levels of migration aspirations among young Europeans. Would Europeans who were in their twenties in the 1970s and 1980s have had similarly high aspirations to migrate?

Until now, the European Union has conceived free movement as a *negative* freedom, focusing its actions on the removal of all sorts of barriers to free movement. However, we suggest that free movement should be understood as a *positive* freedom: individuals need support to help them realise their migration aspirations. Put differently, “the absence of formal restrictions on movement of people across or within borders does not in itself make people free to move,”⁸² Various examples of governments worldwide taking action to actively support their nationals who want

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Recorded in 2017, the observation that Europeans want to migrate appears to remain valid as of 2020. The absence of data in some EU member states for the years 2018 to 2020, however, makes reliable comparisons impossible. It also remains to be seen what impact the Covid-19 pandemic will have on migration aspirations in Europe.

⁸¹ Silvia Migali and Marco Scipioni, “Who’s about to leave? A global Survey of Aspirations and Intentions to Migrate”, *International Migration* 57, no. 5 (2019): 181-200, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/imig.12617>.

⁸² Jeni Klugman, “Human Development Report 2009: Overcoming Barriers—Human mobility and development”, *UNDP-HDRO*, 2009, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2294688.

to emigrate point to the fact that some active support helps individuals realise their migration aspirations. They include most notably the Filipino government with its pre-departure orientation seminars,⁸³ or the Chinese government with its “Going West” campaign, (though possibly for objectives other than helping their citizens realise their positive freedom to migrate).⁸⁴ When it comes to the EU actively supporting intra-EU settlements, however, European authorities leave a vacuum that is usually filled by private actors, such as for-profit consultants, migration entrepreneurs, trade unions, churches or charities.

Across the EU, migration aspirations have remained fairly stable since 2007, but so has the age gap in relation to it: in 2017, 33% of those aged 15-29 wanted to permanently move to another country, compared to 13% of those aged 50+.⁸⁵ To address these unfulfilled migration aspirations, the European Union needs to develop more mechanisms to support the long-term settlement of Europeans who want to migrate abroad. While migration aspirations often result from dissatisfaction with some areas of one’s life, someone’s inability to fulfil their migration dream could result in long-term discontent and disapproval of European policies with regard to free movement. Existing schemes, such as the Erasmus programme, the European Solidarity Corps or the DiscoverEU programme are all steps in the right direction but they focus on short-term mobility. Going further in this direction, the European Union should support those of its citizens and residents who aspire to migrate more permanently, in a variety of ways.

What we think the EU should do

We want the EU to promote and widen access to EU-wide schemes that already encourage free movement, such as Erasmus, DiscoverEU and the European Solidarity Corps. Both our opinion polling and our qualitative interviews have demonstrated how transformative the experience of travelling and living abroad, especially during people’s formative years in the late teens and early twenties, is for a sense of shared European identity. The EU should continue to develop and increase funding for the hugely popular Erasmus scheme and make it more visible to young people in areas where few people take part in the scheme. Research has shown that whether or not university students embark on Erasmus exchanges does not only depend on disadvantageous individual characteristics, but largely also on the institution in question and the subject of study.⁸⁶ The EU should invest in liaising

⁸³ Commission on Filipinos Overseas, “Home”, *Office of the President of the Philippines*, 2019, <https://cfo.gov.ph/>.

⁸⁴ See Emily T. Yeh and Elizabeth Wharton, “Going West and going out: Discourses, migrants, and models in Chinese development”, *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 57, no. 3 (2016): 286-315, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2016.1235982>.

⁸⁵ Gallup World Poll, “Move permanently to another country”, *World Poll Survey*, 2021, values by age groups.

⁸⁶ Sylke V. Schnepf and Marco Colagrossi, “Is Unequal Uptake of Erasmus Mobility Really Only Due to Students’ Choices? The Role of Selection into Universities and Fields of Study”, *Journal of European Social Policy* 30, no. 4, October 2020: 436–51, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0958928719899339>.

directly with higher education institutions to promote the scheme at Colleges and universities with a high proportion of disadvantaged students, while offering substantive additional financial support for those who lack the means to prepare for and embark on the Erasmus programme. Additionally, the educational benefits of participation in the Erasmus scheme should be made more tangible, through a stronger obligation of home institutions to recognise studies and training completed during people's time abroad.

Similarly, following from our overwhelming findings of free travel as a formative European experience, the EU should resume the growth of the DiscoverEU scheme, with a higher budget for making the experience accessible to a larger number of young Europeans. As a non-educational programme, DiscoverEU can arguably have the most resonance among young people from a variety of backgrounds and give them the opportunity to experience Europe on a personal level, no matter their academic attainment, which can be shared as a generationally formative moment with their peers across Europe. Practically, this involves lowering the minimum age to participate in the scheme from 18 to 16, so as not to exclude those who leave school after ten years of schooling and are already in vocational training or jobs by the time they are eligible to participate in the DiscoverEU programme. The European Solidarity Corps is another useful programme to enable young people who want to go abroad and gain work experience for their resumé, but relatively few young Europeans know about it. Hence, the EU should increase the programme's visibility to that of the Erasmus programme and involve more organisations in offering placements. Naturally, this means revoking the discontinuation of traineeships and jobs from 2022 onwards as part of the European Solidarity Corps scheme. This two-way learning experience of having young people work in communities or charitable projects abroad is a great way to foster mutual understanding across Europe and presents an opportunity the EU cannot miss.

We want the EU to address East–West and North–South imbalances within Europe when it comes to freedom of movement. As Eurobarometer data has shown, there are vast country-level differences in who makes use of their right to free movement. Rather than being an 'elite universities only' scheme, Erasmus should give incentives to students from West and North European universities to study at institutions in Eastern and Southern Europe. In addition to offering a wider range of courses run in English in non-English-speaking parts of Europe, Eastern European languages should be taught in schools to a similar extent that Western European languages are taught across Europe. While there certainly are labour market reasons why many students wish to learn English, French or Spanish, solely offering those options as second and third languages only solidifies the gap between those countries belonging to the European core versus the European periphery. Of course, national school curricula are outside the EU's competency, but the EU is not only its institutions, but also the union of its member states. The EU should thus open up the conversation about the possible benefits of widening foreign language learning options in schools in member states. Additionally, making local language classes a firm part of any Erasmus preparation and stay would enhance the cross-cultural experience for young

Europeans and allow them to engage with their host communities in a more meaningful way. The EU could also establish incentives within the DiscoverEU scheme to make Eastern Europe more attractive to participants, such as extending periods of validity for tickets in the region, assistance to develop sightseeing programmes or the organisation of events and festivals gathering participants.

We want the EU to enable those Europeans who want to migrate to actually do so.

As we have shown, a large proportion of EU citizens want to migrate but do not, despite their globally unique entitlement to do so. If migration aspirations are high, but people stay put, their ability to migrate might be hindered. While non-action despite high mobility aspirations does not necessarily mean that people do not migrate because of administrative or other barriers, we ask the EU to investigate and conduct more research into unrealised aspirations for intra-EU migration and to develop ways to address the issues they uncover. Support for people wishing to migrate could include establishing administrative support and information services to help intra-EU migrants with questions around health insurance, pensions and wider financial planning for moving abroad, or offering integration courses for intra-EU migrants, both pre- and post-departure, in major European cities.

We want the EU to extend the right to free movement to third country nationals who are EU residents.

The tension between borderless movement on the inside and hard borders on the outside of Europe are apparent both in our own data and wider research. However, free movement does not start and end with the external EU borders. It is a privilege, which is distributed by the EU in an unequal manner. The establishment of free movement is a European hallmark, but instead of complacency, it should foster European integration. Rather than trying to harmonise national legislations of the EU27 on rights of third country nationals taking up residency in a second or third EU member state, granting them the right to free movement after two years, for example, would level the playing field for EU citizens and EU residents, in addition to shortening bureaucratic procedures. Further, for asylum seekers, the prospect of legally being able to migrate to another EU state two years after being granted asylum would only be in accord with the wider efforts made by the European Union to facilitate the mobility of EU citizens.

Enabling free movement within the European Union requires extensive efforts to remove the true spirit of the European project, but might even result in fewer irregular and dangerous secondary movements. Lastly, offering freedom of movement to EU residents could actually strengthen the argument for EU citizenship, rather than weaken it. Long-term residents would not feel as compelled to naturalise for the sole instrumental purpose of gaining the right to freedom of movement; rather, the desire to acquire citizenship would come from association with the community and a feeling of belonging in the chosen country of residence.

As we have shown throughout this chapter, young Europeans highly value freedom of movement. While we are strong proponents of the right, there are still many Europeans who do not approve of free movement, and even more who have not

personally benefited from it. We acknowledge those concerns and wish to close by saying that our call for the extension of free movement is not meant as a normative compulsion that all Europeans *should* lead more mobile lifestyles. On the contrary, it is precisely because so many have not benefited from it that we call for freedom of movement to be made more *accessible* to all Europeans, rural, urban, East and West.

3. Climate Change

Reja Abramska-Wyss and Victoria Honsel

What young Europeans want EUrope to do

Our polling on climate change has found Europeans across age groups are largely united in what they want the EU to do. Most Europeans (58%) in our March 2020 polling want the EU to be carbon neutral by 2030, with an additional 20% aiming for 2040.⁸⁷

Europeans across all age groups see a range of different political actors as responsible for achieving this goal, including national governments. In particular, young Europeans place more emphasis on international institutions and local governments than older generations. Our qualitative research suggests that this focus on a wide range of institutions emerges from young Europeans' sense of urgency about the matter. For example, a policy expert from Hungary born in 1991 says:

“It’s not a national level problem, it’s a global level problem”

“Deal with climate change or energy efficiency programmes. It’s a very challenging area we have to find the right answers, the right common answers at a European level. It’s not a national level problem, it’s a global level problem, so we have to be united, unite in [...] an action plan or something like that.”⁸⁸

The belief that individuals bear the primary responsibility for climate action is almost constant across age groups (33%). Young people are not more likely to think that individuals bear the primary responsibility, and do not emphasise consumerist habits more than other age groups.⁸⁹ This is one of the criticisms often made of the youth climate movement, especially in high-income countries. It is argued that members of

⁸⁷ Garton Ash and Zimmermann, 6 May 2020.

⁸⁸ Europe’s Stories, “Interview with János Kele”, *europeanmoments.com*, 2020, <https://europeanmoments.com/interviewees/janos>.

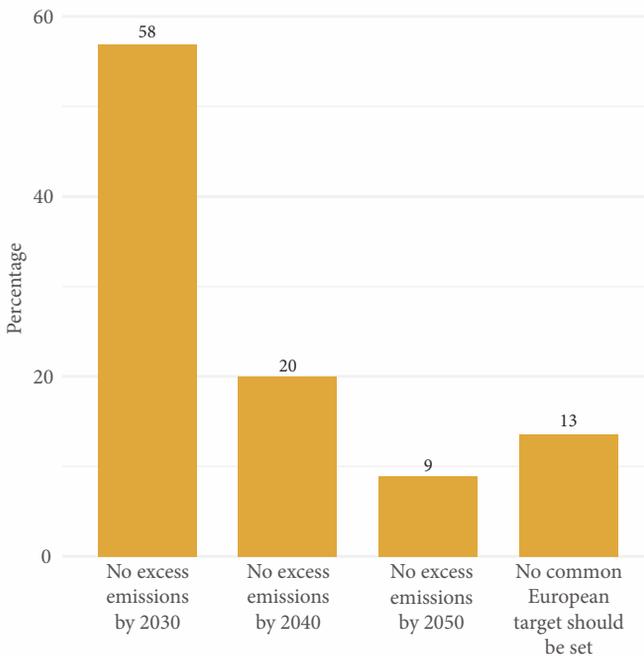
⁸⁹ Renee Cho, “How Buying Stuff Drives Climate Change”, *State of the Planet*, 16 Dec 2020, <https://news.climate.columbia.edu/2020/12/16/buying-stuff-drives-climate-change/>.

Generation Z or “Generation Greta” want everyone and everything to change drastically, but they are not willing to give up their own living standards.⁹⁰ However, studies of the Fridays For Future movement have shown that its activists are indeed willing to give up certain individual privileges,⁹¹ and are ready for “slower economic growth and some loss of jobs” as a result of more climate action.⁹²

Figure 9

Most Europeans want carbon-neutral EU by 2030

Carbon emissions stemming from cars, planes and industries are an important driver of climate change. How quickly should EU countries reduce their carbon emissions in a joint effort?



Source: eupinions survey, conducted in March 2020

⁹⁰ Jörg Thomann, “Bücher über Fridays for Future: Gretarianer sind ziemlich anspruchsvolle junge Leute”, *FAZ.NET*, 26 Jun 2020, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/rezensionen/sachbuch/zwei-neue-buecher-ueber-greta-thunberg-und-fridays-for-future-16812278.html>.

⁹¹ Maximilian König, “Fridays for Future’-Studie: Sie sind jung und wollen was ändern”, *MAZ - Märkische Allgemeine*, 26 Mar 2019, <https://www.maz-online.de/Nachrichten/Politik/Fridays-for-Future-Studie-Sie-sind-jung-und-wollen-was-aendern>.

⁹² Jost de Moor Katrin Uba, Mattias Wahlström, Magnus Wennerhag and Michiel De Vydt, “Protest for a Future II: Composition, Mobilization and Motives of the Participants in Fridays For Future Climate Protests on 20-27 September, 2019 in 19 Cities around the World”, 2020, <https://sh.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1397070&dswid=9234>.

Overall, the Fridays For Future movement recognises the importance of individual actions but aims to steer away from solely blaming individual consumers. Instead, they emphasise the responsibility of politicians, arguing they need to recognise climate change as a matter of utmost urgency.⁹³ Fittingly, young Europeans are more likely to suggest that governments impose a carbon tax to transition away from fossil fuels, and to suggest that governments focus on establishing re-training programmes for fossil fuel employees. In contrast, older age groups are more likely to emphasise subsidising renewable energy. Similarly, and most strikingly, young Europeans seem more willing to accept restrictions in order to combat climate change than older generations. For example, our September 2020 poll revealed that almost two-thirds of young Europeans are willing to accept the restriction of dietary choices to vegetarian and vegan in public eating facilities.⁹⁴ Yet in the same poll, we found that young Europeans are slightly less likely than other age groups to think the EU is not doing enough to combat climate change—even though a staggering 69% believe the EU is not doing enough.⁹⁵

This finding is corroborated in the Eurobarometer 501.⁹⁶ We cannot infer from our data, but it is possible that this willingness to accept more restrictions and to demand more ambitious climate targets while being slightly less critical of the EU, is the result of young Europeans regarding a wider array of actors as responsible. This is supported by the Eurobarometer 490, which shows that Europeans aged 15–24 are more likely to see all actors offered to them in the survey as responsible for tackling climate change. Or, as a Finnish PhD researcher born in 1981, shared in her interview with us:⁹⁷

“I think that the biggest burning problem of our generation or our time is for sure climate change. I see EU has a lot of potential...it’s such a big problem that one nation can’t really fight against that in an efficient way. So I think that’s really a field or a topic where EU has a lot to offer. But I don’t see that EU is doing enough. So I would like to see EU really committing to a carbon-free society by 2030.”

In a similar manner, the Flash Eurobarometer 478, conducted in March 2019, finds that the vast majority of young Europeans believe climate change should be a priority in the EU

⁹³ This urgency is part of the reason why they argue that individual consumers’ actions are not enough. Additionally, they see going beyond the individuals’ responsibility as a matter of justice. Large-scale corporations, industry and individual, privileged consumers (some of whom are among the climate youth themselves) significantly contribute to global warming and have to be held accountable. Also see: Benjamin Bowman, “Fridays for Future: How the Young Climate Movement Has Grown since Greta Thunberg’s Lone Protest”, *The Conversation*, 28 Aug 2020, <https://theconversation.com/fridays-for-future-how-the-young-climate-movement-has-grown-since-greta-thunbergs-lone-protest-144781>.

⁹⁴ Garton Ash, *et al.*, 20 Nov 2020.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Directorate-General for Communication, “Special Eurobarometer 501: Attitudes of European citizens towards the Environment”, *European Commission*, Mar 2020, https://data.europa.eu/data/datasets/s2257_92_4_501_eng?locale=en.

⁹⁷ Europe’s Stories, “Interview with Laura Nördstrom”, *europeanmoments.com*, 2020, <https://europeanmoments.com/interviewees/laura>.

for the years to come (67%). Moreover, 41% of them believe that climate change, the environment, and eco-friendly behaviour are not given sufficient coverage in the school curriculum.⁹⁸

In agreement with our own polling, an extensive cross-European study focusing on the individual-level determinants of climate change perception by Poortinga *et al.* shows that the age effect varies across countries. In almost all studied countries, older respondents were more likely to question the attribution of climate change to humans.⁹⁹ However, in 10 out of the 23 studied countries, the association was insignificant between age and the following factors: climate perception (as a risk or concern); seeing a trend towards global warming; seeing negative impacts; general concern about climate change. This shows a great variability of the age-effect depending on context and type of concern about climate change.

Of course, this does not mean there is no age gap at all. It mainly points to the fact that the relationship between age and attitudes towards climate change, as well as expectation from the EU, is less straightforward than the emergence of the Fridays For Future movement or previous scholarship from the US might suggest.¹⁰⁰ Our research finds that there might be a stronger period effect, as Europeans across all age groups are currently concerned about climate change. Taking a more nuanced view on climate change attitude demonstrated by Poortinga *et al.*, we thus argue for a minor age effect.

It is mainly the *concern* for climate change which is similar across age groups. There is a more significant divide regarding the *kind of actions* that should be taken to tackle global warming. In line with demands made by current youth movements, our polling shows that young Europeans are more in favour of strong climate change interventions, such as restricting diets in public spaces, restricting car use or increasing taxes. However, together with the middle-range age group, they are less likely than older Europeans to support a ban on short-haul flights and the most likely to support national governments bailing out national airlines following the Covid-19 pandemic. This emphasises that while young Europeans seem to believe restrictions to individual behaviour are important, that does not make them more likely than other age groups to support interventions in areas they are most affected by.

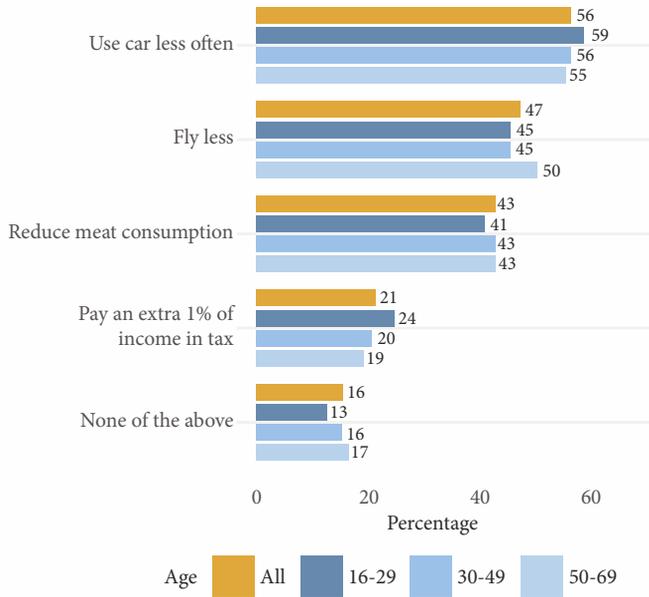
⁹⁸ Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture and Directorate-General for Communication, “Flash Eurobarometer 478: How do we build a stronger, more united Europe? The views of young people”, *European Commission*, Apr 2019, https://data.europa.eu/data/datasets/s2224_478_eng?locale=en.

⁹⁹ Wouter Poortinga, Lorraine Whitmarsh, Linda Steg, Gisela Böhm and Stephen Fisher, “Climate Change Perceptions and Their Individual-Level Determinants: A Cross-European Analysis”, *Global Environmental Change* 55 (March 2019): 25–35, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2019.01.007>.

¹⁰⁰ Matthew Ballew, Jennifer Marlon, Seth Rosenthal, Abel Gustavson, John Kotcher, Edward Maibach and Athnoy Leiserowitz, “Do Younger Generations Care More about Global Warming?”, Yale University and George Mason University, New Haven, CT: *Yale Program on Climate Change Communication*, 6 Nov 2019, <https://climatecommunication.yale.edu/publications/do-younger-generations-care-more-about-global-warming/>.

Figure 10**Europeans will drive or fly less, but reluctant to pay more tax to help combat climate change**

Which of the following actions, if any, would you be ready to take to help combat climate change?
(Select all that apply.)



Source: *eupinions* survey, conducted in September 2020

Furthermore, our March 2020 polling suggests that 53% of young Europeans believe that authoritarian states are better equipped than democracies to tackle the climate crisis.¹⁰¹ This does not mean that young Europeans do not value democracy, quite the contrary (see Chapter 5, on democracy). Instead, it points to a strong sense of urgency and young Europeans wanting a multi-actor response to climate change, which includes increasing political pressure on either themselves, fellow citizens or perhaps businesses.

A similar conclusion is suggested by de Moor *et al.*, who find that around three out of four respondents at global Fridays For Future protests agreed with the statement that “the government must act on what climate scientists say, even if the majority of people are opposed.” They argue that this is rather a sign of desperation than anti-democratic sentiment, as their respondents also preferred democracy over other forms of governments.¹⁰²

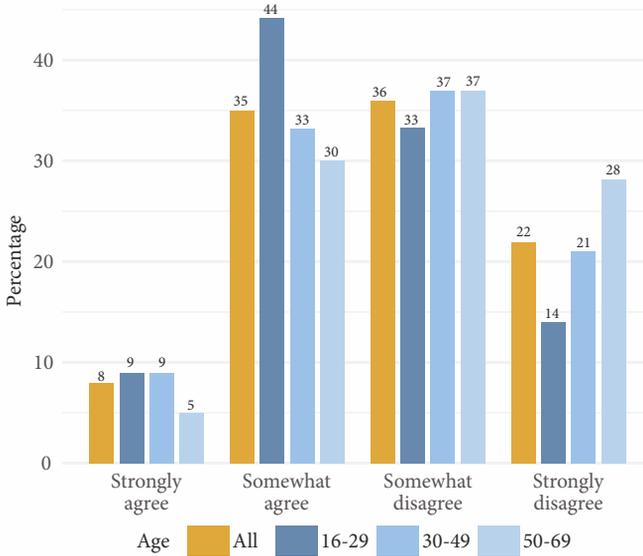
¹⁰¹ Garton Ash and Zimmermann, 6 May 2020.

¹⁰² de Moor *et al.*, “Protest for a Future II”, 2020.

Figure 11

53% of young Europeans think authoritarian states are better equipped than democracies to tackle the climate crisis

Would you agree or disagree? "Authoritarian states are better equipped than democracies to tackle the climate crisis."



Source: *eupinions survey, conducted in March 2020*

What the EU is and is not doing

Whereas a large majority of Europeans in our survey wanted the EU to aim for net zero emissions by 2030 or 2040, the EU is aiming for 2050, with a reduction of the net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030.¹⁰³ In December 2019 the EU announced the European Green Deal—a plan to move towards a sustainable economy, restore biodiversity and cut pollution. The plan spans different policy sectors of the EU and entails initiatives such as the ‘New European Bauhaus’, an initiative for sustainable and innovative urban planning, or the European Climate Pact, which encourages citizens to become ambassadors for climate change and make connections between different European climate change actors, be it activists, institutions or individuals. As part of the European Green Deal, the EU also has long-term plans for structural change. This includes a roadmap to reach the climate target, or the European Climate Law, which turns “this political commitment into a legal obligation”,¹⁰⁴ and of course the Just Transition Fund, which provides financial support for those most affected by the move towards a sustainable economy.

¹⁰³ The European Commission, “2030 Climate Target Plan”, *European Commission*, 11 Sep 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/eu-climate-action/2030_ctp_en.

¹⁰⁴ Florence School of Regulation, “The European Green Deal”, *EUI: Florence School of Regulation*, 19 May 2020, <https://fsr.eui.eu/the-european-green-deal/>.

In addition, 37% of the post-pandemic recovery funds have been reserved for the green transition—amounting to a sum of €265 billion.¹⁰⁵ This programme forms part of the European Green Deal's Investment Plan to further connect finance with sustainability by mobilising and stimulating sustainable public and private investment.¹⁰⁶ In the context of the Investment Plan, the European Commission has, for example, declared the plan to develop a EU Green Bond Standard. This voluntary EU-wide standard is necessary for establishing what is considered 'green', defining the best practice in reporting and verifying sustainability indicators and for improving the comparability across the market.¹⁰⁷ Eventually, this aims to increase the effectiveness, transparency, credibility and comparability of the green bond market, which is of growing importance for encouraging real economic investments in green assets and infrastructure. In order to qualify for Investment Plan funds, a project must contribute to one of the EU's six environmental objectives and "do no significant harm" to the other five objectives: climate change mitigation; climate change adaptation; sustainable use and protection of water and marine resources; transition to a circular economy; pollution prevention and control, protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems.¹⁰⁸

However, there are several voices raising concerns about the distribution of these funds. Firstly, national governments will be in charge of the distribution of the funds. Whereas the EU demands that member states apply to the fund with a spending plan and reserves the right to scrutinise the plans, the reactions on whether or not the green regulations go far enough have been mixed.¹⁰⁹ Many have raised concerns about loopholes that will increase mismanagement of funds and decrease the impact they will have on reaching the EU's climate change goals.¹¹⁰ And in an interview we conducted, the mayor of Warsaw (and runner-up in the Polish presidential elections), Rafał Trzaskowski, points out how wanting to tackle climate change but not getting the necessary funds for it is one of the reasons why Warsaw, along with other major Eastern European capitals, has appealed to the EU for direct funding.

¹⁰⁵ Kira Taylor, "EU agrees to set aside 37% of recovery fund for green transition", *EURACTIV*, 29 Jan 2021 [18 Dec 2020], <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy-environment/news/eu-agrees-to-set-aside-37-of-recovery-fund-for-green-transition/>.

¹⁰⁶ European Commission, "Financing the green transition: The European Green Deal Investment Plan and Just Transition Mechanism", *European Commission*, 14 Jan 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/newsroom/news/2020/01/14-01-2020-financing-the-green-transition-the-european-green-deal-investment-plan-and-just-transition-mechanism.

¹⁰⁷ EU Technical Expert Group on Sustainable Finance. "Report on EU Green Bond Standard", June 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/business_economy_euro/banking_and_finance/documents/190618-sustainable-finance-teg-report-green-bond-standard_en.pdf.

¹⁰⁸ European Commission, "EU taxonomy for sustainable activities", *European Commission*, 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/banking-and-finance/sustainable-finance/eu-taxonomy-sustainable-activities_en.

¹⁰⁹ Frédéric Simon, "Do No Harm: EU Recovery Fund Has Green Strings Attached", *EURACTIV*, 27 May 2020, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy-environment/news/do-no-harm-eu-recovery-fund-has-green-strings-attached/>.

¹¹⁰ Esther Snippe and Kira Taylor, "Concerns Raised over Green Spending as EU Moves Forward with Recovery Plan", *EURACTIV*, 17 Feb 2021, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy-environment/news/concerns-raised-over-green-spending-as-eu-moves-forward-with-recovery-plan/>.

“We need help from the European Union, not only to the country, but also to the cities and regions and we are fighting for direct access to EU money. I’m afraid the EU government will use political criteria to redistribute money from the EU funds, and then it would be very difficult for us in the city to confront climate change.”¹¹¹

Secondly, the lack of a common EU fiscal policy gets pointed out, with Robert Habeck, co-leader of the German Green Party and MP, arguing in our interview with him that a common fiscal policy is needed to increase investments in renewable energies and to turn the green transition into a “success story”, that is, a transition Europeans are not afraid of any more.

“We are fighting for direct access to EU money”

Thirdly, as Wolfgang Münchau pointed out in one of the webinars we organised on the subject, there exist only three categories for ‘green investments’ in the EU: 0%, 40% and 100%. These three tiers are based on the ‘Rio markers’ which were originally developed by the OECD to quantifiably monitor

development assistance.¹¹² Each new EU project or policy is evaluated and assigned a weight as to whether it makes a ‘principal’ contribution to climate mitigation targets (100%), a ‘significant’ one (40%), or makes no contribution at all (0%).¹¹³ These categories, however, are aspirational, as numbers associated with each project are rounded up and projects are classified as a whole (even if only a part of the project makes climate action contributions), meaning everything which falls even slightly above 0% quickly falls into the 40% category and so on, aiding countries in greenwashing their recovery plans.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, plans with low (or no) ‘contribution’ to climate mitigation are not immediately downgraded in priority and must only show that they ‘do no significant harm’ to the climate.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Europe’s Stories, “Interview with Rafał Trzaskowski”, *europeanmoments.com*, 2021, <https://europeanmoments.com/stories/rafal-trzaskowski>.

¹¹² European Commission, “Supporting climate action through the EU budget”, *European Commission*, 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/budget/mainstreaming_en; OEC Development Assistance Committee, “Rio Markers for Climate: Handbook”, *OECD*, n.d., https://www.oecd.org/dac/environment-development/Revised%20climate%20marker%20handbook_FINAL.pdf.

¹¹³ European Commission, “Guidance to member states – Recovery and resilience plans”, *European Commission*, 17 Sep 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/3_en_document_travail_service_part1_v3_en_0.pdf; European Commission, “Supporting climate action through the EU budget”, 2021.

¹¹⁴ Romain Weikmans and J. Timmons Roberts, “The international climate finance accounting muddle: is there hope on the horizon?”, *Climate and Development* 11, no. 2 (2019): 97-111, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17565529.2017.1410087>; Wolfgang Münchau, “Beware of smoke and mirrors in the EU’s recovery fund”, *Financial Times*, 20 Sep 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/0ba23192-5f43-402d-8f26-6fce0ab669f3>.

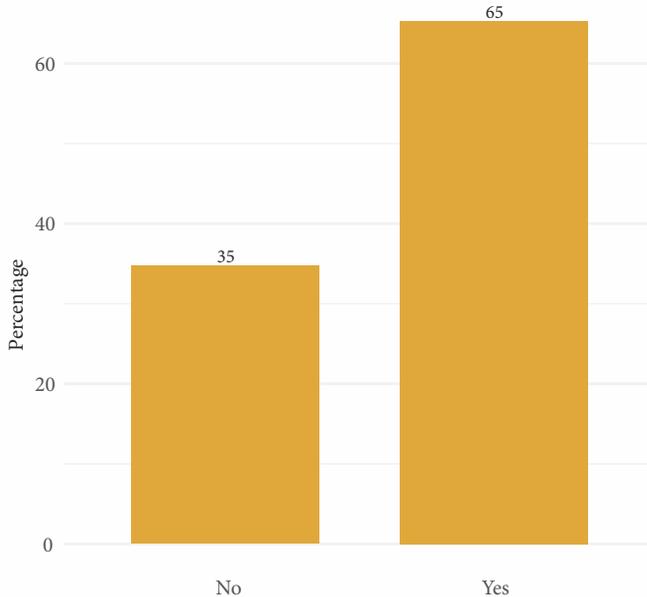
¹¹⁵ European Commission, “Guidance to member states – Recovery and resilience plans”, 2020.

Finally, there is also a more radical critique of the EU, which argues that the EU is generally ‘a bad thing’ for climate. For example, George Monbiot, a political activist and journalist known for his climate activism, argues that national governments are able to hide behind the EU institutions and push through corporate interests they wouldn’t be able to get away with in their own national contexts.¹¹⁶ As an example, he points out the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), through which agricultural landowners receive funds, whether or not they need them, and are even incentivised to ‘set aside’ farmland. This threatens European wildlife, as farmers and investors recognise the financial potential in turning wildlife areas into unused farmland. In our webinar, Dieter Helm, a leading expert on the political economy of climate change, strongly agreed with this critique of the CAP.¹¹⁷

Figure 12

To help combat climate change, two in three Europeans would support a ban on short flights to destinations that could be reached within 12 hours by train

To help combat climate change, would you support a ban on short flights to destinations that could be reached within 12 hours by train?



Source: *eupinions* survey, conducted in September 2020

¹¹⁶ George Monbiot, “6. The problem seems to be that governments can hide behind the European Council and European Commission. On behalf of corporate lobbyists, they quietly push through policies they would never dare to propose at home”, Tweet, @GeorgeMonbiot, 11 Mar 2021, <https://twitter.com/GeorgeMonbiot/status/1370007716152934404>.

¹¹⁷ George Monbiot, “The shocking waste of cash even Leavers won’t condemn”, *theguardian.com*, 21 Jun 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/21/waste-cash-leavers-in-out-land-subsidie>; George Monbiot, “4. The EU’s Common Agricultural Policy, by far the biggest item in its budget, is one of the most destructive forces on Earth. The perverse incentives it creates have destroyed hundreds of thousands of hectares of prime habitat”, Tweet, @GeorgeMonbiot, 11 Mar 2021, <https://twitter.com/GeorgeMonbiot/status/1370007365232234497>.

Considering what Europeans are willing to do to contribute to effective climate action in comparison to what the EU is currently doing, we find several discrepancies. Summing up our earlier findings, Europeans are largely united in thinking the EU does not do enough to combat climate change, and in wanting EU countries to reach net zero by 2030 or 2040. They see different actors responsible for it (from individuals to businesses, to different levels of political actors) and see investment in renewable energies as the best course of action to move away from fossil fuels. On a more individual level, they are willing to drive and fly less, but tend to prefer banning the form of transport their age group is less likely to engage in. However, our polling shows that two in three Europeans would support banning short-haul flights that could be replaced by train rides of up to 12 hours, which is a suggestion taken from the climate plan of the Swiss Young Green Party.¹¹⁸ Taken together, this data points towards Europeans wanting to move forward farther and faster with climate action, especially in areas where the impact on climate change is unmistakable.

What we think the EU should do

In its actions against climate change, the EU is still focusing on what it knows best: regulating, funding and setting goals. The recovery fund and the reserved 37% for a green recovery represent an important change in European fiscal policy. Moreover, the significance of the new climate law is not to be understated—although several major elements of the EU climate law proposed by the more ambitious European Parliament were watered down following long and intense debates with the Council and the Commission. For example, whereas the European Parliament called for an intermediary reduction target of 60% by 2030, in order to reach the 2050 goal, the European Council set it at 55%.¹¹⁹ Additionally, the carbon budget, which sets the amount of emissions the EU can emit in any given year while still staying on track to achieve their climate goals, as well as a rule that member states have to end fossil fuel subsidies, was only implemented minimally or not at all.¹²⁰ ***We think that the Council and Commission should follow an intermediary reduction target of at least 60% and rule that member states have to end fossil fuel subsidies. These suggestions are outlined by the European Parliament which is elected by the European public. In general, the Parliament's proposals are closer to what Europeans want and therefore the Commission should follow the Parliament on climate policies in the future.***

¹¹⁸ Junge Grüne, "Klimaplan", *Junge Grüne Schweiz*, n.d., <https://www.jungegruene.ch/klimaplan>; Junge Grüne, "Massnahmenkatalog der Jungen Grünen Schweiz für Netto-Null Treibhausgasemissionen bis 2030", *Junge Grüne Schweiz*, n.d., [https://data2.jungegruene.ch/userfiles/files/Junge%20Gru%CC%88ne%20Massnahmenkatalog%20-%20Netto%20Null%20Treibhausgasemissionen%202030\(1\).pdf](https://data2.jungegruene.ch/userfiles/files/Junge%20Gru%CC%88ne%20Massnahmenkatalog%20-%20Netto%20Null%20Treibhausgasemissionen%202030(1).pdf); Garton Ash *et al.*, 20 Nov 2020.

¹¹⁹ Note that the most ambitious factions of the European Parliament, such as the Green Party faction, called for a 65% target. See Kate Abnett, "EU climate law talks dodge the 'elephant in the room'", *Reuters*, 2 Feb 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-climate-change-eu-law-idUKKBN2A22KM>; Elena Sánchez Nicolás, "EU Capitals Water down MEPs' Ambition in Climate Law", *EUobserver*, 3 Apr 2021, <https://euobserver.com/green-deal/151117>.

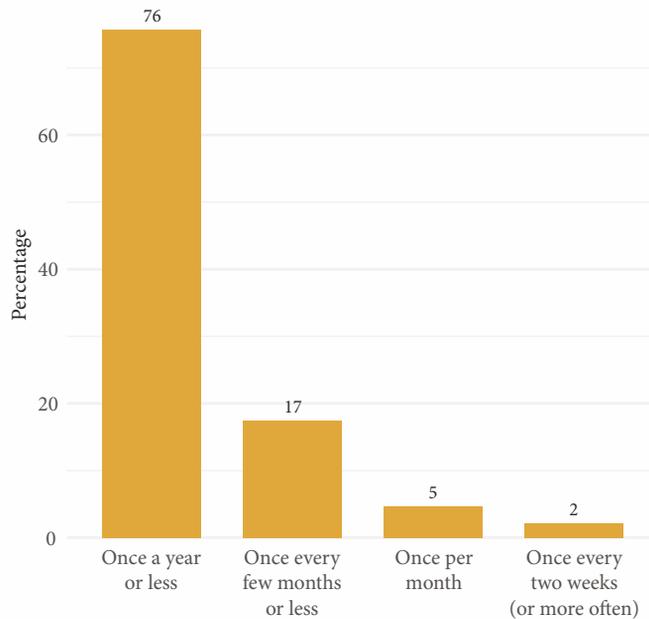
¹²⁰ Frédéric Simon and Kira Taylor, "Breakthrough as EU negotiators clinch deal on European climate law", *EURACTIV*, 21 Apr 2021, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/climate-environment/news/break-through-as-eu-negotiators-clinch-deal-on-european-climate-law/>.

It is important to point out that not supporting the carbon budget element is related to the Commission favouring a net zero goal which allows for carbon offsetting, whereas the European Parliament calls for a reduction of real emissions. While some carbon offsetting can prove useful, climate change researchers have pointed out that there are not enough so-called ‘carbon sinks’ in the world to balance out worldwide emissions. Net zero is based on a logic which stems from accounting—the term does not capture the intricate mechanisms behind carbon offsetting, such as the risk of putting too much (emission) burden on nature (such as forests) or the difficulties of offsetting ongoing fossil fuels emissions in a short enough timespan.¹²¹ Consequently, the European Green Deal and the new European climate law might sound more promising and ground-breaking than they will be in reality. Shining a light on the still ongoing debates and subjecting them to scientific analysis makes any sense of optimism dwindle. Europeans want the EU to deliver, but the EU is the slow-moving institution it has always been. This does not mean that there is no room for improvement.

Figure 13

**76% of Europeans flew once a year or less within Europe
(prior to the outbreak of Covid-19)**

Prior to the outbreak of Covid-19, on average how frequently did you fly within Europe?



Source: eupinions survey, conducted in September 2020

¹²¹ Greenpeace European Unit, “Why relying on offsets won’t stop climate breakdown”, *Greenpeace*, 23 Oct 2020, <https://www.greenpeace.org/eu-unit/issues/climate-energy/45187/europe-cant-rely-on-nature-to-achieve-climate-objectives/>; Umair Irfan, “Can you really negate your carbon emissions? Carbon offsets, explained”, *Vox*, 27 Feb 2020, <https://www.vox.com/2020/2/27/20994118/carbon-offset-climate-change-net-zero-neutral-emissions>.

However, the European Parliament is not the non-plus-ultra of climate change policies either. Whereas its plans are generally more ambitious, it failed for example to address the issue of the CAP in an adequate manner and even cut down on some of the Commission's climate targets in the CAP reform proposal. For example, the Parliament voted against an emission target of 30% for the agricultural sector by 2027 and refused to protect grasslands and peatlands.¹²² Yes, it demands a higher eco-scheme than the Commission (30% instead of 20%) which means that 30% of the direct payments budget is designated to flow towards ecological agriculture schemes,¹²³ but this is not an excuse for failing to protect peatlands which store a significant amount of CO₂, which is released if the lands are drained.¹²⁴ On top of that, the Commission and the Parliament are struggling to come to a common definition of what an 'active farmer' is—clearing the way for further misuse of CAP funds by agricultural landowners. ***If the goal is net zero by 2040 or 2050, the EU has to be much more radical in reforming the CAP to address its negative contribution to climate change and must move beyond the impasse which has been created by the different vested interests in the EU.***

This is not the only thing the EU can do to move closer to the expectations of Europeans. The EU has to become more specific and output-oriented. Keeping the EU's climate action within traditional confines is not what is needed for a matter as urgent as climate change—and it is certainly not what young Europeans want the EU to do. The EU cannot solve climate warming for all of Europe, let alone the world though the new Biden presidency is leading to a renewed emphasis and interest in global climate action. But the EU can demonstrate what a climate policy for Europeans looks like and nudge its member states by leading by concrete example.

We want the EU to take proactive action towards cutting down short-haul flights. It should go beyond what France has done recently—outlawing short-haul flights which can be replaced by train rides of up to 2.5 hours—to ban flights which could be replaced by a train journey of under 12 hours.¹²⁵ But what might banning short-

¹²² Elena Sánchez Nicolás, "EU Farming Deal Attacked by Green Groups", *EUobserver*, 22 Oct 2020, <https://euobserver.com/green-deal/149826>.

¹²³ Gerardo Fortuna, "Portuguese Presidency to Give MEPs a New Eco-Scheme Offer in CAP Talks", *euractiv.com* (blog), 21 Apr 2021, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/agriculture-food/news/portuguese-presidency-to-give-meps-a-new-eco-scheme-offer-in-cap-talks/>.

¹²⁴ Franziska Tanneberger, Lea Appulo, Stefan Ewert, Sebastian Lakner, Niall Ó Brocháin, Jan Peters and Wendelin Wichtmann, "The Power of Nature Based Solutions: How Peatlands Can Help Us to Achieve Key EU Sustainability Objectives", *Advanced Sustainable Systems* 5, no. 1 (January 2021): 2000146, <https://doi.org/10.1002/adsu.202000146>; University of Leicester, "Drainage: A Key Concern for Tropical Peatlands", University of Leicester, n.d., <https://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/geography/research/projects/tropical-peatland/threats-to-tropical-peatlands>.

¹²⁵ Note that a previous poll has already shown that Europeans are in support of restricting short-haul flights. However, our polling result is the first to find that they are willing to travel up to 12 hours instead (whereas previous estimates have been more conservative); Kim Willsher, "France to ban some domestic flights where train available", *The Guardian*, 12 Apr 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/apr/12/france-ban-some-domestic-flights-train-available-macron-climate-convention-mps>.

haul flights in Europe mean? First, it would mean banning an activity which is harmful to the environment, but could easily be replaced by alternatives. Single-person car use is also very harmful (an argument which is often used against restricting air travel), but more difficult to replace or restrict without increasing already existing inequalities.¹²⁶ Secondly, it would mean cutting a majority of all intra-European flights. If we take the EU definition of short-haul flights, meaning all flights of up to a 1500 km flight distance, and use a Central European city as the starting point, then most EU cities are within the radius. This remains true with the more conservative measurement using 12 hours of train travel time. For example, a London–Amsterdam business trip would still very much be feasible, as it takes roughly four hours by Eurostar. So would a holiday connecting Paris and Rome—a distance which can be covered in ten hours. Implementing restrictions based on travel time by train has the potential to be a more equitable approach to banning short-haul flights than banning by distance. It also carries the potential to start with a lower benchmark and expand the ban as train connections are improved. On top of that, flying is one of the most if not *the* most unequal and most carbon-intensive forms of consumption.¹²⁷ Together with our short-haul flight question we asked Europeans how often they used to fly before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Our results re-emphasised what other research has also pointed out: a large majority of Europeans (76%) fly once a year or less. Combining this polling result with what we outline in previous chapters, ***we suggest the EU lead by example and ban its officials from taking short-haul flights for business trips if there is a train connection of under 12 hours journey time for the same route.*** For example, it is not very ‘next generation EU’ of the President of the EU Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, to travel from Riga to Berlin and on to Rome, all in one day, to officially hand over the NextGenerationEU recovery fund (to mention just one leg of her ‘tour des capitales’).

The EU should allocate more direct funding to regions or cities with ambitious climate targets. Building on our polling and our extensive set of interviews, we also suggest that the EU focus more on initiatives which deliver results that are clearly attributable to the EU. This does not mean changing the complete system, such as turning the EU into an even stronger supranational institution. Instead, it is about the EU showing determination, and signalling capability to handle climate change. Therefore the EU should allocate more direct funding to regions or cities with ambitious climate targets. This could even be framed as a competition between cities or regions, similar to that for the European Capital of Culture, which would help create a transition Europeans are “not afraid of anymore” (in the words of Robert Habeck). Alternatively, a climate change version of the “roaming success story” would also be an option,¹²⁸ especially since reliance on funding schemes carries the risk of other

¹²⁶ BBC News, “Climate change: Should you fly, drive or take the train?”, *BBC News*, 24 Aug 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-49349566>.

¹²⁷ Diana Ivanova and Richard Wood, “The Unequal Distribution of Household Carbon Footprints in Europe and Its Link to Sustainability”, *Global Sustainability* 3 (2020): e18, <https://doi.org/10.1017/sus.2020.12>.

¹²⁸ In our work with German high schools, the elimination of roaming fees across the EU was a frequently mentioned example of EU success and identification with the EU project. We attribute this to the fact that eliminating roaming charges requires a coordinated, cross-national effort, making it easier

actors (such as national governments) claiming the resulting projects for themselves, as funding sources can easily be left out or downplayed in relevance. To be clear, doing these things will not solve the underlying issue of weak emission targets. But as a supranational organisation with limited powers and finances, compared to all the member states taken together, the EU's options are limited.

The EU should aim to improve the European railway system. In the short term, the EU should enable an easy-to-access online booking system for train journeys across the European continent. In the longer term, the EU should support a large-scale expansion of the European railway system and subsidise train fares. As a condition, the EU could require of national railway companies that all new and revived train connections carry a common European name. Through the interconnected nature of the railway system and the current lack of international cooperation in the railway system—exemplified by how difficult it is to book cross-national train rides compared to international flights—such a project would immediately become a recognisable European project.

In the past, the EU's most ambitious targets became watered down in intra-institutional debates. For the future, the EU must thus make sure to take more action, as Europeans expect the EU to deliver, and young Europeans specifically want the EU to limit their options for (individual and collective) carbon-intensive behaviour. It is unclear if the EU has the legal and symbolic power to do what young Europeans expect them to do. From the EU's perspective, this is a conundrum. But even just looking at our polls, it becomes clear that nobody expects the EU to solve it all at once. For example, this report did not focus much on the role of big businesses, as our work has mainly revolved around the European public, but their role is not to be understated either. However, being occupied with ambitious or less ambitious targets and regulations for itself and its member states can never be an excuse for not delivering on core areas such as agriculture or travel and failing to produce EU-specific output. Delivering is especially important in the case of climate change due to the increasing urgency of the matter, as well as the fact that it has been identified as a strategic priority of the new Commission. Thus, as we argued in an opinion piece published in the Guardian, one might even say that “to save Europe, they [European leaders] will have to save the planet.”¹²⁹

to be identified as an EU project.

¹²⁹ Daniel Judt, Reja Wyss and Antonia Zimmermann, “To save the EU, its leaders must first focus on saving the planet”, *The Guardian – This is Europe: European Opinion*, 27 Jul 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/commentisfree/2020/jul/27/europe-coronavirus-planet-climate>.

4. Social Europe

Kristijan Fidanovski and Guillaume Paugam

Writing about European social policy is a complicated exercise. Social policy remains predominantly a national, welfare-state prerogative. Nevertheless, the current European Commission has put “an economy that works for all” at the heart of its strategic agenda.¹³⁰ This matches the strong interest of Europeans, and young Europeans in particular, in welfare and employment issues and their desire to see European institutions more involved in these areas.

What young Europeans want Europe to do

Studies conducted over the last five years show that young Europeans are concerned with social and employment issues. They increasingly want the EU to tackle social issues, in collaboration with national governments. According to the 2018 Eurobarometer, the two main challenges for Europeans were unemployment (41% of respondents) and social inequality (37% of respondents).¹³¹ Employment concerns were the highest among young Europeans. In the 15-24 age bracket, 44% named unemployment as the main challenge for the EU. Our March 2020 poll found that young Europeans stood out in mentioning inequality as the second biggest threat.¹³² This is consistent with findings from another European survey from 2019, which show that young Europeans are disproportionately concerned with job insecurity, even compared to people above the age of 46.¹³³

Since employment and social issues rank high among young Europeans’ worries, it is not surprising that they also identify them as policy areas that are crucially important

¹³⁰ European Commission, “An economy that works for people”, *European Commission*, n.d., https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people_en; European Commission, “Ursula von der Leyen”, *European Commission*, 9 Oct 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2019-2024/president_en.

¹³¹ Directorate-General for Communication, “Special Eurobarometer 479: Future of Europe”, *European Commission*, Oct-Nov 2018, https://data.europa.eu/data/datasets/s2217_90_2_479_eng?locale=en.

¹³² Garton Ash and Zimmermann, 6 May 2020.

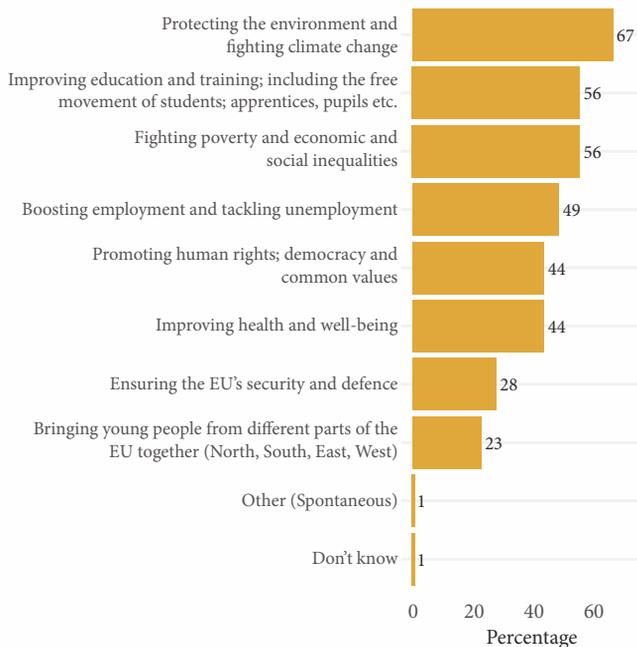
¹³³ de Vries and Hoffmann, “Great expectations”, 2019.

for the EU. The 2019 Eurobarometer report on the views of young people highlights that: fighting poverty, economic/social inequalities and boosting employment all rank in the top five of young Europeans’ desired priorities for the EU.¹³⁴ They are named by 56% and 49% of respondents respectively, well ahead of security and defence at 28%, and rank third, below only the protection of the environment (67%) and improving education and training (56%).

Figure 14

Priorities of young Europeans (aged 15-30) in 2019

Which of the following topics should be a priority for the EU in the years to come? (Max 5 answers)



Base: all respondents (N=10,786)

Source: Eurobarometer 2019.¹³⁷

The 2018 European Youth Eurobarometer corroborates the importance of social policy to young people.¹³⁵ However, this is less true of the “very young” age subgroup, which is more likely to identify environmental protection and education as more important. This discrepancy between the young and the very young is also confirmed by

¹³⁴ Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture and Directorate-General for Communication, “Flash Eurobarometer 478: How do we build a stronger, more united Europe? The views of young people”, *European Commission*, Apr 2019, <https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/ResultDoc/download/DocumentKy/86163>.

¹³⁵ Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture and Directorate-General for Communication, “Flash Eurobarometer 455: European Youth”, *European Commission*, Jan 2018, <https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/ResultDoc/download/DocumentKy/82294>.

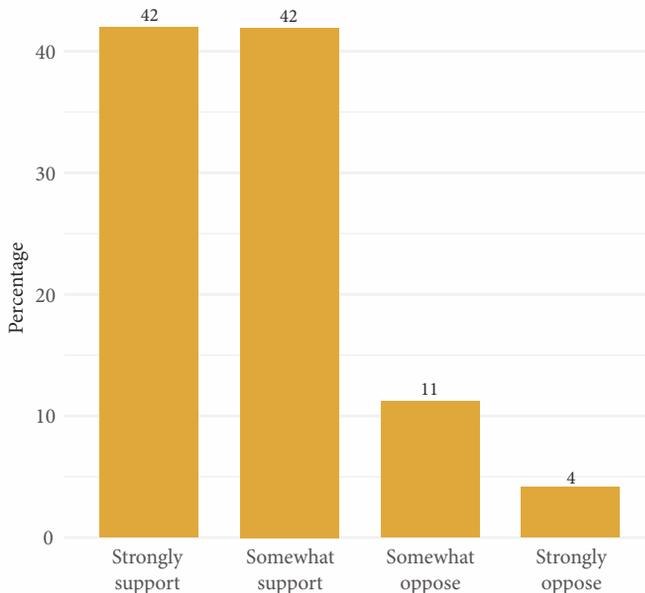
eupinions and suggests that the primacy of social policy for young people might be a cohort effect.¹³⁶ As previously marginal concerns come to the fore, especially in the green and digital realms, it will not be surprising if the prioritisation of social concerns begins to decline once today’s children become the young people of tomorrow.

However, the pandemic might have further increased the salience of employment and social affairs for all young people. The 2020 Standard Eurobarometer finds that people aged 15-24 would spend the largest share of the EU budget on employment and social affairs, just above climate change (cited by 49 and 48% of respondents respectively).¹³⁷ Several Eurobarometers, such as in 2018 and 2021, paint a similar picture, with young people being more concerned about wages, comparable living standards, education and job training than older demographics.¹³⁸ It remains to be seen whether this trend is a mere period effect or whether it might persist after the end of the pandemic.

Figure 15

84% of Europeans support a mandatory minimum wage

To what extent do you support or oppose the EU’s plans to make a minimum wage compulsory in all member states?



Source: eupinions survey, conducted in March 2020

¹³⁶ de Vries and Hoffmann, “Great expectations”, 2019.

¹³⁷ Directorate-General for Communication, “Standard Eurobarometer 93: Public opinion in the European Union”, *European Commission*, Summer 2020, https://data.europa.eu/data/datasets/s2262_93_1_93_1_eng?locale=en.

¹³⁸ Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Directorate-General for Communication, “Special Eurobarometer 509: Social Issues”, *European Commission*, Mar 2021, https://data.europa.eu/data/datasets/s2266_94_2_509_eng?locale=en; Directorate-General for Communication, “Special Eurobarometer 479: Future of Europe”, 2018.

This desire for social justice is also evident on the issue of a minimum wage. Our March 2020 polling wave found that 84% of young Europeans would favour an EU proposal to introduce a mandatory minimum wage in member states, with a similar level of support among all age groups.¹³⁹ This is consistent with results from the 2020 Eurobarometer.¹⁴⁰ This strong preference for social protection at the EU level among both the general population and young people is reflected further in the desire for a free-market economy combined with a high level of social protection and fair taxation of large technology companies in the EU.¹⁴¹

In other respects, however, young Europeans stand out from the general population much more starkly. While the general population identifies “fighting corruption” as their main priority for their economic security, young Europeans highlight the need to “provide jobs for everyone”. Similarly, in the March 2021 Special Eurobarometer, when asked which elements are the most important for the EU’s economic and social development, respondents aged 15-24 prioritised equal opportunities and access to the labour market.¹⁴²

“I hope that [...] the EU is a beacon of civility and progressive socialism”

Where young people particularly stand out is not only in terms of their focus on jobs but also in the desire to combine them with a certain degree of equality. In the 2018 Future of the EU report, they are more likely than average to cite gender equality as part of the ideal future for the European

Union (named 36% of the time, as opposed to 26% for all age groups).¹⁴³ This matches findings in the 2020 Eurobarometer, where they are more likely than average to support EU-level measures to improve gender equality in the workplace.¹⁴⁴ Similarly, the March 2021 Special Eurobarometer shows that young people are more likely than older age groups to mention the rights of minorities and protection against discrimination as crucial issues within social policy.¹⁴⁵

They are also more likely than the general population to support the introduction of a universal basic income (UBI), as well as an increase in welfare benefits for those with financial difficulties.¹⁴⁶ Our analysis of the European Social Survey (ESS) also shows that in the surveyed EU countries, support for UBI was 60% among young

¹³⁹ Garton Ash and Zimmermann, 6 May 2020.

¹⁴⁰ Directorate-General for Communication, “Standard Eurobarometer 93”, 2020.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Directorate-General for Communication, “Special Eurobarometer 509: Social Issues”, 2021.

¹⁴³ DG COMM, “Special Eurobarometer 479: Future of Europe”, 2018.

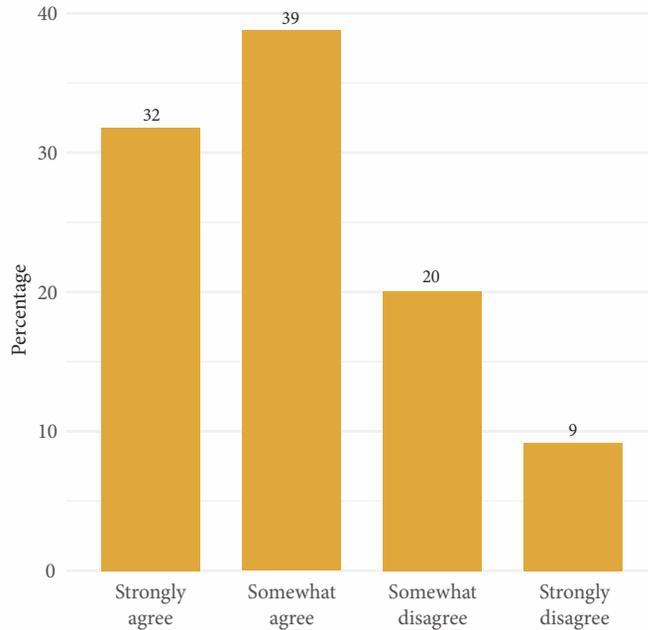
¹⁴⁴ DG COMM, “Standard Eurobarometer 93”, 2020.

¹⁴⁵ Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Directorate-General for Communication, “Special Eurobarometer 509: Social Issues”, 2021.

¹⁴⁶ DG COMM, “Special Eurobarometer 479: Future of Europe”, 2018.

Figure 16**71% of Europeans believe the state should give all citizens a basic income**

To what extent do you agree or disagree that EU member states should pay all citizens a basic income, regardless of their employment status?



Source: eupinions survey, conducted in March 2020

people aged 15–30, as opposed to 53% of those over 30. Support for UBI is confirmed by our March 2020 polling wave, finding that 71% of people aged 16–29 support the introduction of UBI, although this time no more than other age groups.¹⁴⁷ Even the 2020 YouGov/WeMove poll contains very similar conclusions.¹⁴⁸ Interestingly, however, in a rare instance of being *less* enthusiastic about social policies at the EU level, young people are less likely to support increased job protection by the EU in the light of increasing automation.¹⁴⁹ This finding is particularly paradoxical in the context of Covid-19, as young people working in the service sector have been disproportionately more likely to lose their jobs.

“Build the infrastructure to protect incomes across member states for those who are in need”

¹⁴⁷ Garton Ash and Zimmermann, 6 May 2020.

¹⁴⁸ WeMoveEurope, “Results of the YouGov Poll about UBI”, *WeMove and YouGov*, n.d., <https://www.wemove.eu/it/results-yougov-poll-about-ubi>.

¹⁴⁹ Garton Ash *et al.*, 25 May 2021.

Overall, however, young people in Europe share similar concerns about job training, wages, active support for employment, social protection, in addition to a greater desire for gender equality than older age groups. Our qualitative data from interviews with some 200 Europeans also reflect this, albeit in a somewhat less resounding fashion. In fact, our young interviewees did not discuss social policy as often as they discussed some other areas, which suggests that they might view social concerns as too obvious to highlight. Those interviewees who *did* cite social policy concerns made several compelling arguments. In an expert interview with us, a Greek politics professor focused on the importance of “build[ing] the infrastructure to protect incomes across member states for those who are in need”.¹⁵⁰ A 28-year-old Polish IT specialist took an even bolder approach and suggested the creation of a common European healthcare as a means of creating “something similar to the United States of the EU”.¹⁵¹ A 30-year-old Hungarian communications expert made a value-driven appeal by arguing that “we shouldn’t allow [poverty] to be happening within the EU”.¹⁵² A 52-year-old British-Romanian teacher expressed his wish for the EU as follows: “I hope that [...] the EU is a beacon of civility and progressive socialism, where the health and happiness of people are prioritised over profit and the natural environment is protected, expanded, and treasured.”¹⁵³

So far, we have described young Europeans’ concerns, policy priorities and desire for more EU-level action in the realm of social policy and employment. A distinct—but related—dimension of Social Europe is European social solidarity between member states. Young people (84%) are more likely than all age groups (79%) to agree that EU member states should help another member state guarantee a minimum living standard for its population.¹⁵⁴ This shows a desire for European social solidarity beyond more conventional areas, such as a natural disaster or a terrorist attack.

Other surveys, including those by *eupinions*, confirm this finding.¹⁵⁵ When asked how they would use a potential Eurozone budget, millennials at all levels of education prioritised supporting economically weaker countries (over 40%) and the unemployed (over 30%). Young Europeans also stood out from older generations in wanting a Eurozone budget to support people moving to another country for work. Finally, their solidarity transcends borders, as both our own March 2021 polling and the ESS indicate that young Europeans support disproportionate taxation of wealthier member states.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁰ Europe’s Stories, “Interview with Spyros Kosmidis”, *europeanmoments.com*, 2020, <https://europeanmoments.com/stories/spyroskosmidis>.

¹⁵¹ Europe’s Stories, “Interview with Aleksander Baworowski”, *europeanmoments.com*, 2021, <https://europeanmoments.com/interviewees/aleksander>.

¹⁵² Europe’s Stories, “Interview with Diana Zsoldos”, *europeanmoments.com*, 2020, <https://europeanmoments.com/interviewees/diana>.

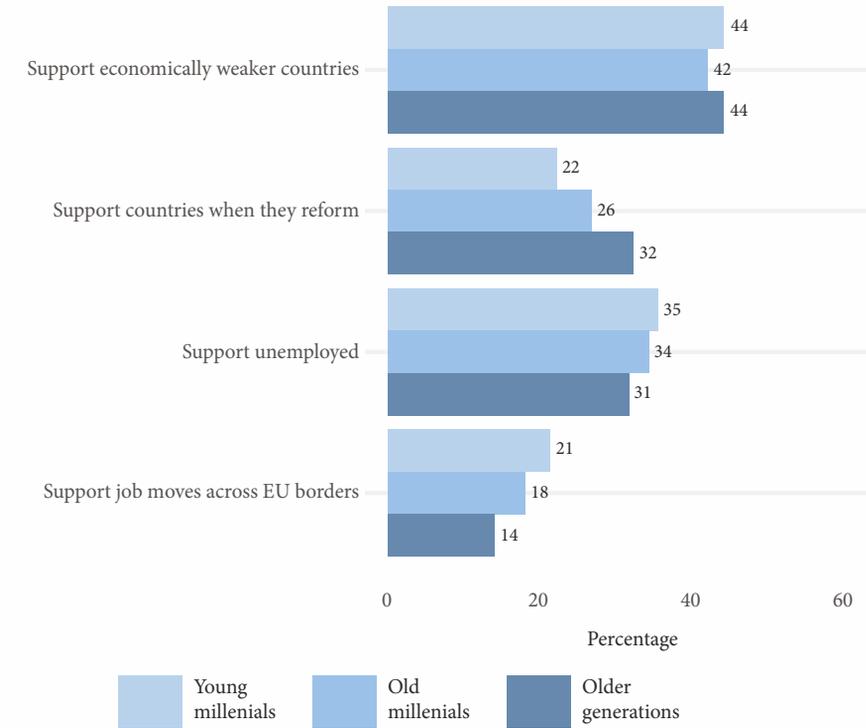
¹⁵³ Europe’s Stories, “Interview with Douglas Williams”, *europeanmoments.com*, 2020, <https://europeanmoments.com/interviewees/douglas>.

¹⁵⁴ Directorate-General for Communication, “Special Eurobarometer 479: Future of Europe”, 2018.

¹⁵⁵ Anna auf dem Brinke, Katharina Gnath and Philipp Ständer, “What Millennials Think about the Future of the EU and the Euro”, *eupinions*, 1 Dec 2016, <https://eupinions.eu/de/text/what-millennials-think-about-the-future-of-the-eu-and-the-euro>.

Figure 17

Young Europeans' ideas on how to spend a potential Eurozone budget



Source: *eupinions*, 2016.¹⁵⁷

Young Europeans also exhibit a certain degree of optimism with regards to the future of European social policy. They are more likely (72%) than average (62%) to think that, by 2030, there will be a more social Europe and that social rights issues will play a significant role in building a stronger EU. Finally, the ESS shows that, when asked if benefits would be higher or lower if more decisions about social benefits were made by the EU, 35% of young people think they would be higher, while 30% think they would be lower.¹⁵⁸ This stands in stark contrast to people above the age of 30, only 31% of whom think benefits would be higher, compared to 39% of whom believe they would be lower.

¹⁵⁶ Garton Ash *et al.*, 25 May 2021; European Social Survey, “ESS Round 8 (2016/2017) Technical Report”, London: *ESS ERIC*, 2017, https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/docs/round8/survey/ESS8_data_documentation_report_e02_1.pdf.

¹⁵⁷ Anna auf dem Brinke, Katharina Gnath and Philipp Ständer, “What Millennials Think about the Future of the EU and the Euro”, *eupinions*, 1 Dec 2016, <https://eupinions.eu/de/text/what-millennials-think-about-the-future-of-the-eu-and-the-euro>. ‘Young millennials’ refer to those aged 14–25 and ‘old millennials’ to those aged 26–35 at the time of survey.

¹⁵⁸ European Social Survey, “ESS Round 8 (2016/2017) Technical Report”, 2017.

Overall, the strong support among young people for different aspects of European social policy is not only significant in and of itself, but also hints at the salience of this topic for young Europeans compared to other policy areas. Young Europeans regularly rank social issues as paramount in polling different policy areas. Furthermore, a significant proportion of young Europeans (compared to older cohorts) support specific European social policies; this is not the case for other policy areas. Many young Europeans support higher tax rates for wealthier member states—even if it applies to their own countries. Overall, the evidence suggests that young Europeans have a high commitment to social equality. As indicated throughout this chapter, young Europeans attribute high importance to social issues, often (albeit not always) more so than the general population, and are usually at least as likely as the general population to support more action on these issues at the EU level.

Interestingly, despite the enthusiasm of young people for more social policy at the EU level, there is limited knowledge of what the EU already does in this realm. When asked about the European Pillar of Social Rights, introduced by the EU in 2017, people aged 15-24 are even less likely than the general population to be able to describe it (6% versus 8%).¹⁵⁹ The following section turns to specific EU initiatives in social and employment policy.

What the EU is and is not doing

In the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, the social aspect of the EU came second to the need for fiscal emergency and austerity measures. However, the gradual overcoming of the Eurozone crisis restored social policy to the EU's agenda. In his 2015 State of the Union speech, former European Commission President Juncker set out his vision for the aforementioned European Pillar of Social Rights. In 2017, his initiative was formally embraced by the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission.

The pillar consists of 20 principles meant to guide the work of the European Commission on employment and social policy. The current Commission, led by Ursula von der Leyen, was quick to commit to the pillar.¹⁶⁰ While President von der Leyen's proud, pre-Covid-19 proclamation that Europe possessed "some of the highest social protection and welfare standards in the world" hinted at some complacency in this area, her recent leadership on the Covid-19 Recovery Fund cemented the centrality of social justice for her Commission.¹⁶¹

Beyond Brussels, social policy has also been firmly embraced in the rhetoric of European leaders. Solidarity has been portrayed as a signature EU value, with French President Emmanuel Macron positing that "Europe is where social security was

¹⁵⁹ European Commission, "European Pillar of Social Rights", *European Commission*, 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights_en.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ Ursula von der Leyen, "Mission Letter to Nicolas Schmit", *European Commission*, 1 Dec 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/sites/default/files/commissioner_mission_letters/mission-letter-nicolas-schmit_en.pdf.

created.”¹⁶² Macron’s sentiment has been shared by German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who has unambiguously described “[European] economic and social affairs [as] two sides of the same coin.”¹⁶³

These pronouncements have given rise to firm social policy commitments. Chancellor Merkel has placed particular emphasis on youth, advocating for the European Youth Work Agenda and calling for an enhanced Youth Guarantee during the German presidency of the European Council. Despite criticisms of his social record at home, Macron has spoken of a “social shield for all workers, east to west and north to south” at the European level. In this regard, he frequently mentions France’s revision of the posting-of-workers directive, including the creation of the European Labour Authority.¹⁶⁴

To grasp the centrality of social policy for the current Commission, one needs to look no further than the established six strategic priorities for its term.¹⁶⁵ Three of these priorities are tied to jobs and social policy: “a Europe fit for the digital age”, “a European Green Deal” and “an economy that works for people”. The first two include spending programmes designed to equip people with the skills to work in a greener and more digitalised world while alleviating the socioeconomic pressure on those left behind by the green and digital transitions. The EU confirmed its dedication to a smooth digital transition by placing strong emphasis in the Covid-19 Recovery Fund on the “digitalisation of services, the development of digital and data infrastructure, clusters and digital innovation hubs and open digital solutions”. Overall, member states are expected to allocate 20% of their share of the Recovery and Resilience Facility to digital issues.

However, it is the third strategic priority of the EU that best embodies the notion of “social Europe”.¹⁶⁶ Providing a social component to its fiscal and trade policy, the European Commission has an Executive Vice-President for “an Economy that Works for People”, Valdis Dombrovskis. Additionally, the EU has a separate Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, Nicolas Schmit, whose mission is to “strengthen Europe’s social dimension”.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶² Emmanuel Macron, “For European renewal”, *Élysée*, 4 Mar 2019, https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2019/03/04/for-european-renewal.en?fbclid=IwAR1RjOqe1IsbX-zHeqMfr6hOYZJ_siby3lEvuIHA-LwWHu1Rzx_r9GqHmrI.

¹⁶³ Angela Merkel, “Speech by Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel on Germany’s Presidency of the Council of the EU to the European Committee of the Regions on 13 October 2020 (videoconference)”, *Europa Nu*, 13 Oct 2020, https://www.europa-nu.nl/id/vlcx6v908dum/nieuws/speech_by_federal_chancellor_angela?ctx=vg9hm2g38wdd&tab=0.

¹⁶⁴ Élysée, “Trois ans de travail pour l’Europe”, *Élysée*, n.d., <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/europe>.

¹⁶⁵ Ursula von der Leyen, “A Union that strives for more: My agenda for Europe”, *European Commission*, 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/political-guidelines-next-commission_en_0.pdf.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

An important example of the efforts towards “an economy that works for people” is the minimum wage directive proposal of October 2020, which aims to steer member states towards collective bargaining in wage-setting.¹⁶⁸ It could also help bridge the current gaps between EU member states, some of which have minimum wages as many as seven times higher than others.¹⁶⁹

Yet, to provide just one illustration of how long the road ahead is, implementing the minimum wage directive discussed earlier would require tectonic shifts in most EU member states. Currently, only two EU member states, France and Portugal, have minimum wages that are (barely) above 60% of the national median wage. In most countries, this figure even fails to reach 50%. Unfortunately, the EU’s room for action on this issue has been constrained by strong opposition from several member states.

Beyond its (mixed) record on ensuring a higher minimum wage, the EU is mostly focused on what scholars of social policy have called “active labour market policies”. The word “active” is understood in opposition to “passive” policies—for instance, traditional income support for jobless people, such as unemployment benefits. The European Union has been a long-time champion of “social investment” or using social policy to enhance the employment capacity of people, rather than merely compensating them *ex post* for social risks. Together with UBI-related proposals, which will be discussed later, these novel policies constitute a genuine watershed moment in the history of EU social policy. Interestingly, they do so in somewhat opposite ways, as UBI bypasses any job-related conditionality, while active labour market policies reaffirm the importance of jobs.

More specifically, active labour market policies can include counselling and training for the unemployed, close monitoring of their job search activities, as well as, to paraphrase the economist Dani Rodrik, investment in technologies that augment rather than replace labour.¹⁷⁰ The European Pillar of Social Rights contains the right to unemployment benefits, which must be “of a reasonable duration” and “must not have disincentivising effects on a quick return to employment”.

This commitment to transcending traditional welfare-state interventions seems to be shared by von der Leyen, who has spoken about “creating opportunities for the world of tomorrow and not just building contingencies for the world of yesterday”.¹⁷¹ Efforts at reconfiguring labour markets to fit a dynamic global economy were included in von der Leyen’s inaugural letter to the Jobs Commissioner, with special emphasis on

¹⁶⁸ European Commission, “Questions and answers: Adequate minimum wages”, *European Commission*, 28 Oct 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_20_1967.

¹⁶⁹ Sofia Fernandes and Klervi Kerneis, “A move towards adequate minimum wages in the European Union?”, *Institut Jacques Delors*, 18 Nov 2020, <https://institutdelors.eu/en/publications/a-move-towards-appropriate-minimum-wages-in-the-european-union-2/>.

¹⁷⁰ Martin Sandbu, “Interview with Dani Rodrik: ‘We are in a chronic state of shortage of good jobs’”, *Financial Times*, 15 Feb 2021, <https://www.ft.com/content/bf760159-4933-4fa1-bedd-d8f77accb858>.

¹⁷¹ Ursula von der Leyen, “State of the Union Address by President von der Leyen at the European Parliament Plenary”, *European Commission*, 16 Sep 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_20_1655.

social innovation and “updating our skills agenda”.¹⁷² In a similar vein, Macron has proposed “giving the new European Innovation Council a budget on a par with the United States”, perhaps hinting at a systematic focus on boosting entrepreneurialism in the years to come.¹⁷³

Merkel has also echoed this productivist approach to social policy, as she has refused to see the Covid-19 Recovery Fund as a “short-term crisis management”, but rather as a boost to the EU’s “capacity to tap into new economic opportunities”.¹⁷⁴ In the same speech during her presidency of the European Council, Merkel proclaimed that “European solidarity is not just a humane gesture but a lasting investment. European cohesion is not just a political imperative but also something that will pay off.” The strategic nature of Merkel’s social policy thinking is also evident in her recognition that “a socially and economically just Europe is crucial for democratic cohesion.”

However, this does not mean that European political rhetoric around social policy is completely devoid of more traditional appeals to empathy and humanity. For instance, Macron has expressed a preference for “convergence rather than competition”, as well as “genuine, chosen, organised and concerted solidarity”.¹⁷⁵ He has also lamented that “while we have talked at length over the past ten years about responsibility in Europe, we have neglected the solidarity between us.” Von der Leyen has been equally unequivocal in her call for “dignified, transparent and predictable working conditions”, accompanied by the proclamation that “in our Union, the dignity of work must be sacred.”¹⁷⁶

The justification for the minimum wage directive did contain some social rhetoric.¹⁷⁷ It was highlighted that 10% of workers in the EU live in poverty or that low wages did not increase as much as other wages in recent years. But the vocabulary of productivity was still very prominent: the European Commission argues that minimum wages can “boost productivity and competitiveness.” In a similar vein, von der Leyen has portrayed them as a win–win measure: “dumping wages destroys the dignity of work, penalises the entrepreneur who pays decent wages and distorts fair competition in the Single Market.”¹⁷⁸

Predictably, social policy efforts have recently been bolstered by the Covid-19 pandemic, which has provided an opportunity for both change and continuity. The EU’s NextGenerationEU recovery instrument commits the EU to raise €750 billion on

¹⁷² Ursula von der Leyen, “Mission Letter to Nicolas Schmit”, 2019.

¹⁷³ Emmanuel Macron, “For European renewal”, *Élysée*, 2019.

¹⁷⁴ Angela Merkel, “Speech by Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel on Germany’s Presidency of the Council of the EU to the European Committee of the Regions on 13 October 2020 (videoconference)”, 2020.

¹⁷⁵ Emmanuel Macron, “For European renewal”, *Élysée*, 2019.

¹⁷⁶ Ursula von der Leyen, “State of the Union Address by President von der Leyen at the European Parliament Plenary”, 2020.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

financial markets of ‘free’, non-debt-creating money for member states. Importantly, however, they cannot spend it as they wish.¹⁷⁹ In particular, the ‘centrepiece’ of NextGenerationEU, the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF, €672 billion), is meant to support public reforms and investment in the areas of green and digital transitions. The RRF is expected to sustain the economy by stimulating labour demand, especially in cleaner industries. However, the plan also seeks to support the education and training of workers by equipping them with the skills to be reallocated to digital-intensive industries, thus stimulating labour supply.¹⁸⁰

Aside from the RRF, NextGenerationEU raises €47.5 billion for a project called REACT-EU. These funds have a direct job and social policy usage, especially through the European Social Fund (ESF+).¹⁸¹ They support jobs directly by financing projects enabling employment, especially projects linked to education and training. In the process, they also seek to include marginalised groups, make public services for jobseekers more efficient, support youth employment or promote social enterprises. Again, they focus primarily on the ‘active’ side of social policy.

Another important social initiative emerging from the Covid-19 crisis initiative is SURE (Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency)—as part of which the European Commission raised €100 billion to finance short-time work schemes in member states.¹⁸² The operation was counter-guaranteed by member states to ensure the solvability of the Commission in the eyes of investors. In a show of European solidarity, all member states, even those not benefiting from SURE, contributed to this counter-guarantee. Moreover, through EASE (Effective Active Support to Employment), one of its most recent initiatives, the Commission seeks to incentivise member states to transition slowly from emergency to more permanent recovery measures.¹⁸³ These include job creation, re-skilling the workforce, and modernizing employment services by making potential funding conditional on these reforms.

However, it remains an open question whether and to what extent the EU can synchronise the social policy endeavours of its member states. In line with their wider disagreement on the future direction of the EU, Merkel and von der Leyen have been much more reserved than Macron in this regard. On various issues from Covid-19-related assistance to the minimum wage, Merkel has underlined the importance of

¹⁷⁹ European Commission, “Recovery plan for Europe”, *European Commission*, n.d., https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/recovery-plan-europe_en.

¹⁸⁰ European Commission, “The Recovery and Resilience Facility”, *European Commission*, n.d., https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/recovery-coronavirus/recovery-and-resilience-facility_en.

¹⁸¹ European Commission, “Recovery plan for Europe”, n.d.; European Commission, “EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND”, *European Commission*, n.d., <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/home.jsp>.

¹⁸² European Commission, “SURE”, *European Commission*, n.d., https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/economic-and-fiscal-policy-coordination/financial-assistance-eu/funding-mechanisms-and-facilities/sure_en.

¹⁸³ European Commission, “Questions and Answers: Effective Active Support to Employment following the COVID-19 crisis (EASE)”, *European Commission*, 4 Mar 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_21_971.

ensuring that the “economically strong member states are not excessively burden[ed].”¹⁸⁴ Similarly, von der Leyen has committed to “fully respecting the subsidiarity principle” of reaching policy decisions at the local or national level wherever possible, hence also “fully respect[ing] national competences and traditions.”¹⁸⁵ As demonstrated in this section, the EU has stepped up its social efforts and recognised their essential role as drivers of wider economic growth. A vital challenge now is to devise a mechanism to convert this recognition into specific policy commitments for its member states.

The other challenge, of course, is for the EU to ensure that it can exploit whatever few opportunities it gets to demonstrate its ability to act decisively on behalf of its member states. In contrast to the success of the NextGenerationEU, both in terms of its size and relatively speedy adoption, the EU was much less successful in the procurement of Covid-19 vaccines for its member states, although the speed of the rollout has recently picked up.¹⁸⁶ Despite lacking the relevant institutional framework and experience for a purchase effort of this magnitude, in the face of such an unprecedented crisis, the EU stepped in to avoid separate procurement efforts at the national level. As the latter would have likely led to large inequalities in vaccine availability and concomitant social disillusionment, it can be argued that the pandemic only reaffirmed the EU’s indispensability as a collective European actor, especially in light of the success of the NextGenerationEU.

What we think the EU should do

Social policy scholars often describe the conservative Otto von Bismarck as the founder of the welfare state. Far from any love of the proletariat, his motivation for social insurance schemes in 1880s Prussia was to co-opt the population and fight the spectre of communism. Our approach is not as cynical—social protection is invaluable. However, the Covid-19 crisis does provide President von der Leyen and other European leaders with a window of opportunity to strengthen ties between the EU and Europeans. They should seize it.

For young Europeans, the European project cannot exist without a social dimension. In their view, the EU does not spend enough on employment and social affairs. Yet, they are optimistic about the future of social rights. Unfortunately, their optimism seems little founded on any detailed knowledge, as they can barely name the specific actions already taken by the EU.

¹⁸⁴ Angela Merkel, “Speech by Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel on the German Presidency of the Council of the EU 2020 to the European Parliament in Brussels on 8 July 2020”, *Bundesregierung*, 8 Jul 2020, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/news/speech-by-federal-chancellor-angela-merkel-on-the-german-presidency-of-the-council-of-the-eu-2020-to-the-european-parliament-in-brussels-on-8-july-2020-1768008>.

¹⁸⁵ Ursula von der Leyen, “State of the Union Address by President von der Leyen at the European Parliament Plenary”, 2020; Ursula von der Leyen, “Mission Letter to Nicolas Schmit”, 2019.

¹⁸⁶ The Economist Briefing, “Why the EU’s COVID-19 Vaccination Programme Went Wrong”, *The Economist*, 31 Mar 2021, <https://www.economist.com/briefing/2021/03/31/why-the-eus-covid-19-vaccination-programme-went-wrong>.

Even their support comes with a caveat. Jobs are important to younger Europeans, but the younger the respondents, the more the environment is prioritised over jobs. In polls that separate jobs from social security, young people see jobs as *much* more important, while older Europeans see jobs and social security as almost equally important.

Therefore, ***the EU should keep its current focus on welfare, as well as on making jobs and the green transition mutually reinforcing rather than opposing issues.*** Job creation, together with facilitating people's access to the labour market, is what young people want. And since young people also want a more ambitious environmental policy, EU programmes that combine jobs, skills and the environment are crucial. They should also be as ambitious as possible: the Just Transition Mechanism is a great example. Another area young Europeans strongly care about is gender equality. Luckily, the recent directive proposal by the European Commission about equal pay and pay transparency matches the desire for action expressed by young Europeans, who are dissatisfied with the gender pay gap of 14.1% in the average EU member state in 2019.¹⁸⁷ Overall, there is also a need to experiment with novel policy approaches—including ones that exist on paper but have not been implemented yet in a real-life setting.¹⁸⁸

As the EU finances the economic recovery of its member states, it will need to be more transparent. The details of the recovery effort should not be concealed in bilateral funding agreements with member states. Instead, the EU should make clear not only to member states but also to all Europeans that the funding is earmarked for specific objectives. This will enable Europeans to move away from their traditional images of European conditionality: the austerity reforms in post-2008 bailout packages. The EU must reframe itself as an institution that gives, not one that imposes, but it must also get citizens to recognise that any conditions in place are in their own best interest, thus avoiding future disappointment if said conditions are not met. For the EU to achieve new social milestones, it must first learn to reap some well-deserved political credit for its existing ones.

Speaking of new accomplishments, ***the EU should not miss the occasion to become the great stabiliser—and protector—of young Europeans' jobs and livelihoods.*** It can achieve this by securing social stabilisation through financial stabilisation to cushion the effects of future economic downturns. For instance, if states struggle to cope with a sudden demand for unemployment benefits or short-time work schemes, the EU can help. It can do so because of its ability to raise money on financial markets in very favourable conditions. It can then redistribute this money to struggling member states. This is exactly the idea behind SURE, which the EU has used to finance short-time work schemes in 18 member states, relieving them of the immediate fiscal pressure they were facing. The EU should use the momentum to transform the temporary SURE

¹⁸⁷ Klervi Kerneis, "How to close the gender pay gap in the European Union?", *Jacques Delors Institute*, 2 Mar 2021, <https://institutdelors.eu/en/publications/how-to-close-the-gender-pay-gap-in-the-european-union/>.

¹⁸⁸ Sandbu, 15 Feb 2021.

instrument into a permanent mechanism for exceptional crises and use the success of SURE to move forward with the idea of a European Reinsurance Scheme, to support national unemployment benefit systems when overwhelmed by an economic crisis. At present, however, the EU appears reluctant to preserve SURE beyond the pandemic, with Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights Nicholas Schmit arguing for a focus on employment rather than joblessness.¹⁸⁹

Another area in which this European insurance mechanism could work is social assistance/minimum income schemes. In some countries, like France, young people cannot receive social assistance. Yet, in other countries, this is the principal payment they receive if they are jobless, as they have not had time to build entitlements to social insurance schemes. Young people in Europe are disproportionately likely to have lost their jobs during the pandemic. ***The EU should be adamant in encouraging member states to adopt appropriate minimum income schemes for young people.***

The next crucial priority must be to alleviate the massive gaps in minimum wage provisions across EU member states discussed earlier. The EU should do this gradually, yet resolutely. The first step is to prompt the six member states with no mandatory minimum wage to finally introduce one. The second step is to ***ensure that the minimum wage is set at over 40% of the average wage, which is currently missing in three member states. Finally, the EU should seek to push the minimum to a dignified 50% in the long run,*** even though this would require increases in another seven member states.¹⁹⁰

Action is also needed in the most dynamic realm of contemporary social policy: research on new policies. As the impact of technological and green transitions on jobs is likely to increase in the next decade, ***increased funding for trials focused on new ways of organising social and employment policies will be needed. The EU can play an essential role in trialling policies such as universal basic income that individual member states would otherwise deem utopian.*** As demonstrated earlier, there is a strong demand for UBI in Europe, so it seems unlikely that member states could credibly resist EU-financed trials of UBI. At the very least, the EU should tweak its legal regulations to ensure they do not *prevent* these trials, as was the unfortunate fate of the Finnish UBI trial in 2018.¹⁹¹

Another area in which the EU could increase its protection role is the future of work. The size of the EU's European Globalisation Adjustment Fund for Displaced Workers (EGF), tasked with helping workers who have lost their jobs due to global trade patterns, declined from €500 million to €150 million in 2014-2020.¹⁹² Most Europeans think that many jobs will be lost or transformed by automation and digitalisation.

¹⁸⁹ The Economist, "The EU is trying to become a welfare superstate", *The Economist*, 15 May 2021, <https://www.economist.com/europe/2021/05/15/the-eu-is-trying-to-become-a-welfare-superstate>.

¹⁹⁰ Sofia Fernandes and Klervi Kerneis, "A move towards adequate minimum wages in the European Union?", *Institut Jacques Delors*, 18 Nov 2020, <https://institutdelors.eu/en/publications/a-move-towards-appropriate-minimum-wages-in-the-european-union-2/>.

¹⁹¹ Jon Henley, "Finland to end basic income trial after two years", *The Guardian*, 23 Apr 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/23/finland-to-end-basic-income-trial-after-two-years>.

¹⁹² European Commission, "European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF)", *European Commission*, n.d., <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=326&langId=en>.

The EU is working towards increasing not only the budget but also the scope of the EGF to cover more workers, including those who lose their jobs due to automation. Amidst the current crisis, ***the EU should do its utmost to adopt this upgrade of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund as quickly as possible.***

This points towards deeper questions. As with the relationship between federal monetary policy and national fiscal policies in the Eurozone, one might argue that European social policy is hindered by an odd division of tasks. The EU provides the tool for a competitive, free-market economy, which is undeniably a source of prosperity. But it also has its downsides: workers losing their jobs to member states with a cheaper workforce, atypical employment linked to flexible labour markets and rising inequality. The European Social Fund was created as a corrective mechanism, and indeed does a lot. But correcting for these downsides remains predominantly a member state duty, which they increasingly struggle to fulfil. Welfare states already represent a large share of countries' GDP in terms of taxation and spending, yet increasingly struggle to protect new workers, including women and young people and new forms of work. One piece of reform that could protect these new forms is the proposed EU-wide social security number, which would oblige companies that send workers to other countries to contribute to the budgets of those countries, but also help those workers receive social benefits more promptly.¹⁹³

Moreover, in the context of global competition, countries seek to bring labour and taxation costs down. The window of opportunity for European social policy in the current context needs to trigger significant reflection, including efforts that go beyond the current way of doing things. One must also keep in mind the myriad of political benefits from increased social spending both at national and EU level. If social issues rank so highly among young people, then satisfying their preferences will become not only a moral imperative but also a political one. It will contribute to diminishing the future appeal of populist and anti-EU forces, which tends to feed on socioeconomic disillusionment.

¹⁹³ *The Economist*, 15 May 2021.

5. Democracy

Josef Lolacher and Sophie Vériter

Democracy and the rule of law are at the very heart of the European Union. At the latest since the Maastricht Treaty, the EU has claimed to be not only an economic community, but also a community of values based on democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights. As a former professor of European politics at the University of Oxford put it in one of our expert interviews:

“It is not only a matter of principle that European integration is only about bringing together states which are democratic, but it is also that you cannot have the economic relationship without the rule of law and democracy.”¹⁹⁴ This chapter shows that young Europeans value the EU precisely because it champions these values within and beyond its borders. However, it also finds that the proportion of young Europeans who think that the EU symbolises democracy is decreasing.

“You cannot have the economic relationship without the rule of law and democracy”

The European Union has faced several challenges to democracy in recent years, be it the spread of disinformation undermining informed democratic participation, foreign electoral interference or the rise of populism across Europe. However, we argue that the most urgent and serious threat to democracy that the EU currently faces is that some of its member states have flagrantly and persistently undermined the EU’s fundamental values. The “constitutional revolution” taking place in Hungary since 2010 and the blatant attacks on judicial independence and the freedom of the press in Poland since 2015 gravely undermine the values on which the EU is based.¹⁹⁵ This is especially urgent as the EU’s response has been notably weak in this respect. Compared to these authoritarian developments, the democratic shortcomings of the EU at the supranational level appear secondary.

¹⁹⁴ Europe’s Stories, “Interview with Jan Zielonka”, *europeanmoments.com*, 2020, <https://europeanmoments.com/stories/jan-zielonka>.

¹⁹⁵ In its Nations in Transit report, Freedom House downgraded Poland to a semi-consolidated democracy, and Hungary is no longer classified as a democracy at all (Freedom House, “Nations in Transit 2021”, *Freedom House*, 2021, https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/NIT_2021_final_042321.pdf.)

In the following, we look at the state of democracy both at the supranational and member state levels and highlight what young Europeans expect from the EU, what the EU is currently saying and actually doing to strengthen and safeguard liberal democracy, and what we think the EU should do. We argue that democracy and the rule of law will not defend themselves but need defenders. Hence, we call on the EU to demonstrate that it will not tolerate any illiberal, semi-consolidated democracy in its community.

Before we turn to the expectation of young Europeans, we must define the key concepts of this chapter: democracy and the rule of law. When we talk about the rule of law in the EU, we refer to the democratic rule of law since democracy and the rule of law are, as Habermas famously put it, “co-original”.¹⁹⁶ When speaking of democracy, we refer to liberal democracy, which is not just constituted by elections or the simple execution of the will of the majority, but by an effective system of checks and balances, free and fair elections, parliamentary opposition, an independent judiciary and protected fundamental rights allowing for the discursive exercise of liberal democracy. These fundamental principles can in turn only be safeguarded by the rule of law.

What young Europeans want Europe to do

Building on the qualitative interviews we conducted with some 200 respondents and opinions we polled from a representative sample of EU citizens, we argue that young Europeans take the EU’s founding values—in particular democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights—for granted. The fact that the EU is a community of liberal democracies appears to be an underlying notion that is not really questioned any more. The overwhelming majority of Europeans (proportions ranging from 86% to 94%) think that key principles of the rule of law such as “the independence of judges”, “respect for and application of court rulings” and “acting on corruption” are important or essential.¹⁹⁷

Young Europeans think that the EU’s protection of core values is one of its key advantages. Indeed, 30% of Europeans aged 15-24 believe that “the EU’s respect for democracy, human rights, and the rule of law” is the main asset of the EU—the top answer of a 2019 Special Eurobarometer polling. However, it appears that young

¹⁹⁶ Jürgen Habermas, *Die Einbeziehung des anderen*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1996, 299; This is in line with the European Commission’s understanding, which blends the concept of the rule of law with democracy and fundamental rights. (e.g., European Commission, “Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council. Further strengthening the Rule of Law within the Union State of play and possible next steps”, Brussels, *European Commission*, 3 Apr 2019, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52019DC0163&from=EN>.)

¹⁹⁷ Directorate-General for Communication, “Special Eurobarometer 489: Rule of Law in the European Union”, *European Commission*, Apr 2019, https://data.europa.eu/data/datasets/s2235_91_3_489_eng?locale=en. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2235>.

Europeans have grown slightly disillusioned with the EU's capacity and credibility to uphold its founding values.¹⁹⁸ When asked what the EU symbolises for them personally, young Europeans chose 'democracy' in the early 2010s.¹⁹⁹ However, this trend has reversed since the second half of 2018 (see Figure 18 below). Nevertheless, the percentage of young Europeans associating the EU with democracy has been consistently the highest among all age groups over the past decade.

On average, young Europeans are slightly less satisfied with the way democracy works in their country than at the EU level—a small difference of 3 percentage points (53%).²⁰⁰ However, Eurobarometer polls suggest that “political engagement tends to be felt on a general level, rather than differently in relation to different tiers or levels of governance.”²⁰¹ Therefore, young Europeans' concerns²⁰² about European political processes may only be interpreted as general ones which transcend the national public sphere but most probably reflect their national impressions, given their limited knowledge of the EU and the lack of a meaningful European public sphere.

Hartwig Fischer, Director of the British Museum, argues in one of our expert interviews that the central task of the EU is to make it clear to all citizens what it really stands for: “The EU needs to make people understand what it is really about. It has not been very strong, it has not been very successful in making its members, all the citizens of the EU, really understand the values, the values the EU is based on, and the values it has created.”²⁰³

¹⁹⁸ Younger generations' increasing dissatisfaction with democracy has also been observed at the global level (R.S. Foa, A. Klassen, D. Wenger, A. Rand and M. Slade, “Youth and Satisfaction with Democracy: Reversing the Democratic Disconnect?” Cambridge, United Kingdom: Centre for the Future of Democracy, Oct 2020, https://www.cam.ac.uk/system/files/youth_and_satisfaction_with_democracy.pdf.)

¹⁹⁹ Directorate-General for Communication, “Special Eurobarometer 486: Europeans in 2019”, *European Commission*, Mar 2019, https://data.europa.eu/data/datasets/s2225_91_2_486_eng?locale=en.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

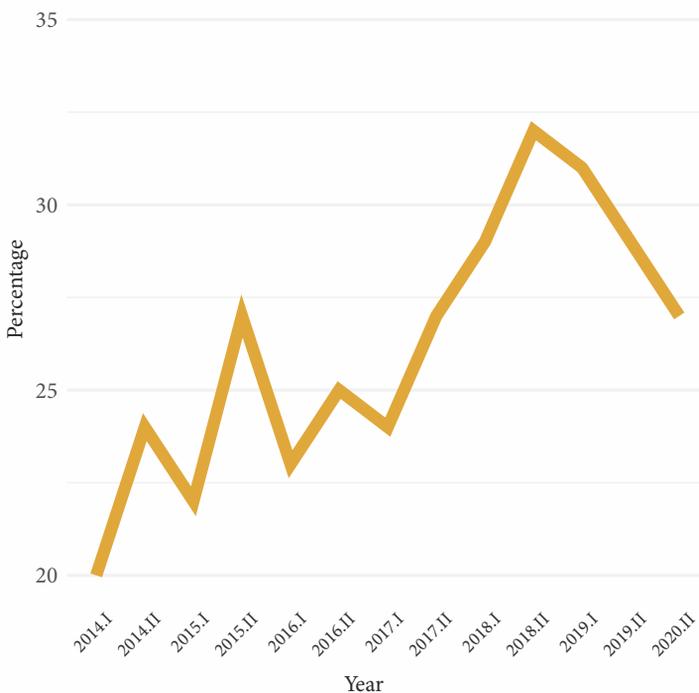
²⁰¹ Directorate-General for Communication, “Parlemeter 2020: A Glimpse of Certainty in Uncertain Times”, *European Parliament*, Feb 2021, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/files/be-heard/eurobarometer/2020/parlemeter-2020/en-report.pdf>, 41.

²⁰² Across all age groups, Europeans' main concerns related to democracy and elections are social networks' lack of transparency in political advertisements, election (cyber-)manipulation, as well as online disinformation and misinformation (Directorate-General for Communication, “Special Eurobarometer 477: Democracy and elections”, *European Commission*, Nov 2018, https://data.europa.eu/data/datasets/s2198_90_1_477_eng?locale=en). When it comes to the Rule of Law, Europeans believe that the top three points which need improvement are making decisions in the public interest, codes of ethics for politicians and acting on corruption (DG COMM, “Special Eurobarometer 489: Rule of Law in the European Union”). Finally, 54% of young Europeans agree that “The rise of political parties protesting against the traditional political elites in various European countries is a matter of concern” (DG COMM, “Special Eurobarometer 486: Europeans in 2019”).

²⁰³ Europe's Stories, “Interview with Hartwig Fischer”, *europeanmoments.com*, 2020, <https://europeanmoments.com/stories/hartwig-fischer>.

Figure 18

Percentage of young Europeans (aged 15-24) who believe the EU symbolises democracy



Source: “Europeans in 2019” Special Eurobarometer

“The EU needs to make people understand what it is really about”

Young Europeans expect the EU to better communicate its fundamental values, but also to act upon them. Indeed, our March 2021 polling results show that a majority of Europeans (65%) believe that the EU should act more decisively to uphold liberal democratic institutions, such as independent courts and media, in all its member states (see Figure 19

below).²⁰⁴ Respondents from Germany (71%) and Poland (70%) were the most supportive. Interestingly, there were only small differences by age to this question, but larger disagreement by education: while 72% of university graduates agreed that the EU should take more decisive action, only 62% of non-graduates supported this.

In one of our expert interviews, Rafał Trzaskowski, Mayor of Warsaw, argues that the EU has to find new ways to uphold liberal democracy and the rule of law in its

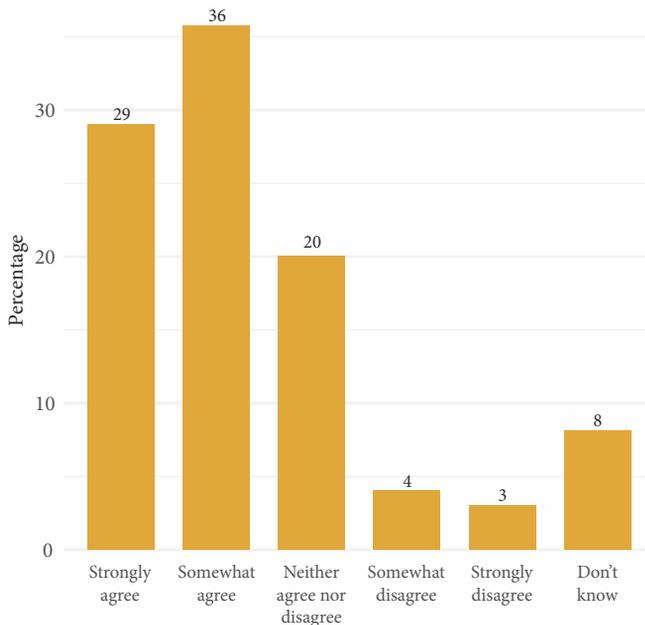
²⁰⁴ Garton Ash *et al.*, 25 May 2021.

member states without punishing European citizens: “Why should we, local governments or the people, be penalised for the irresponsible behaviour of our government? Of course, we want the European Union to be tough, but I think that there are other ways to demonstrate to PiS [the Polish ruling party] that their behaviour will not be tolerated, by directly supporting independent local media, independent NGOs and independent local governments.”²⁰⁵

Figure 19

Two-thirds of Europeans believe the EU should do more to uphold democratic institutions

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? “The EU should act more decisively to uphold liberal democratic institutions, such as independent courts and media, in all its member states.”



Source: eupinions survey, conducted in March 2021

To be sure, most young Europeans *are* overall satisfied with the way democracy works in the EU (57%).²⁰⁶ However, their knowledge of democracy at the EU level is relatively limited. Nearly one in two young Europeans do not know that members of the European Parliament (EP) are directly elected by citizens of each member state.²⁰⁷ Similarly, only one in five respondents of our March 2021 survey with eupinions correctly identified the person who gives the EU’s State of the Union address—that

²⁰⁵ Europe’s Stories, “Interview with Rafał Trzaskowski”, *europeanmoments.com*, 2020, <https://europeanmoments.com/stories/rafal-trzaskowski>.

²⁰⁶ DG COMM, “Special Eurobarometer 486: Europeans in 2019”.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

“Why should we, local governments or the people, be penalised for the irresponsible behaviour of our government?”

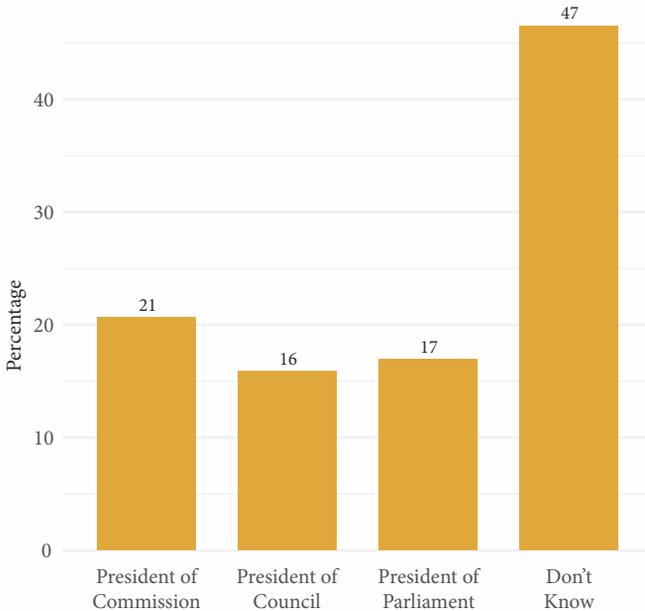
is, the President of the European Commission (see Figure 20).²⁰⁸ How to explain that young Europeans highly value democracy and the rule of law but know so little about concrete democratic processes? We believe that young Europeans understand liberal democracy mainly as a set of values which they support and wish to see the EU uphold—more than as a specific set of political procedures and institutions.

Younger generations tend to express their preferences and engage with political life differently, compared to older European citizens. Voting is the primary means of political expression, but the majority of young Europeans do not vote for MEPs (58%), and our March 2021 poll revealed that they believe that the presence of the European

Figure 20

Only one-fifth of Europeans know who gives the EU State of the Union address

Which senior EU figure gives an annual State of the Union address?



Source: *eupinions* survey, conducted in December 2020

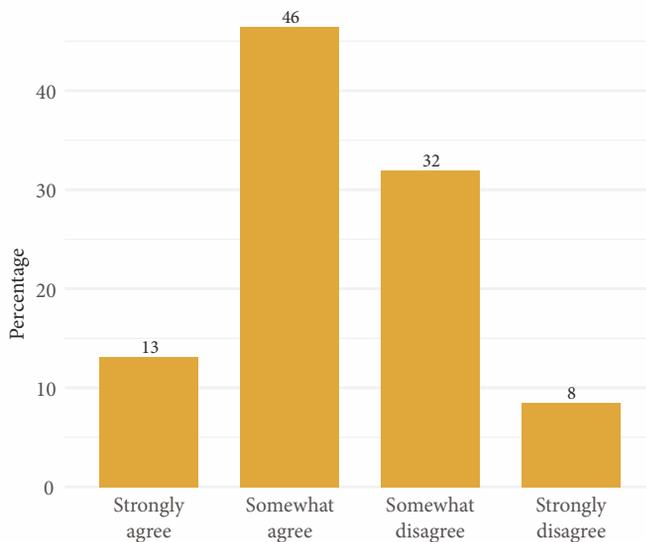
²⁰⁸ Garton Ash *et al.*, 26 Jan 2021.

Parliament is of secondary importance to delivering effective action (59%) (see Figure 21).²⁰⁹ They think more decisions should be taken at the EU level (61%) and they want more action, especially when it comes to urgent matters such as climate change.²¹⁰ However, they do *not* believe that their preferences for such actions are best communicated through voting for parliamentarians in Brussels who they have never met or even heard of, albeit that being the principal channel of direct representation available to them. In fact, most do not even *understand* the European Parliament's role in the adoption of new laws. As a result, they tend to value policy outputs more than political procedures, as strikingly illustrated by our March 2021 poll showing that 53% of young Europeans think that authoritarian states are better equipped than democracies to tackle the climate crisis.²¹¹

Figure 21

Most Europeans think that the presence of the European Parliament is of secondary importance to delivering effective action

"As long as the EU delivers effective action, the presence or absence of the European Parliament is of secondary importance."



Source: *eupinions survey, conducted in December 2020*

²⁰⁹ Directorate-General for Communication, "The 2019 Post-Electoral Survey", *European Parliament*, Sep 2019, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/files/be-heard/eurobarometer/2019/post-election-survey-2019-complete-results/report/en-post-election-survey-2019-report.pdf>; Garton Ash *et al.*, 26 Jan 2021.

²¹⁰ DG COMM, "Special Eurobarometer 486: Europeans in 2019".

²¹¹ Garton Ash and Zimmermann, 6 May 2020.

In sum, as already suggested in this report, young Europeans appear more concerned about what scholars call ‘performance legitimacy’—legitimacy driven by policy outputs—than ‘procedural legitimacy’—legitimacy driven by the nature of policy making processes. However, we argue that this apparent disinterest in and contempt for democratic processes is precisely generated because such processes are currently not appealing nor adapted to Europe’s youth. Young Europeans are interested in an EU that delivers effective action, and they wish to make their voices heard through alternative means rather than European Parliament elections. They wish to see democracy being more deliberative, direct and involving more ordinary people as representatives. This directly points to the importance of the recently launched Conference on the Future of Europe, which we address further below. In the longer term, it also calls for rethinking the ways in which the EU engages with its young citizens in political discussions, one that does not only consist of parliamentary elections and ad hoc bottom-up conferences. As put by John Keane in *Democracy and Media Decadence*: “Democracy is coming to mean much more than free and fair elections, although nothing less.”²¹²

What the EU is doing and is not doing

In the 1950s, the European Communities were established as an economic project to foster economic cooperation and to preserve and strengthen peace and liberty after the Second World War. Even if the European Communities were not explicitly founded on democracy and liberalism, the Union undoubtedly evolved as a community of liberal democracies.²¹³ Nevertheless, it was not until 1993, when the Copenhagen criteria were defined, that norms relating to liberal democracy explicitly became part of the EU’s accession criteria. The Treaty of Amsterdam (1997) then enshrined for the first time the fundamental ‘principles’ on which the EU is based. Their status was further strengthened by the Treaty of Lisbon (2007) which refers to the fundamental ‘principles’ now as founding ‘values’. Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), one of the two Treaties forming the constitutional basis of the EU, thus reads as follows: “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.”

²¹² John Keane, *Democracy and Media Decadence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, 80.

²¹³ When in 1961 an authoritarian regime (Spain under Franco) wanted to join the Community, the European Parliamentary Assembly clearly expressed its resistance and outlined that “the guaranteed existence of a democratic form of state, in the sense of a free political order, is a condition for membership” (European Parliamentary Assembly, “Question Orale Sur L’ouverture De Négociations Avec L’Espagne”, 1962: 81-84.) On the development of the European Union as a “community of values” and the role that liberal democratic values already played in the early years of European integration, see Kiran Klaus Patel, *Project Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 200, 146-175.

The rule of law, democracy and fundamental rights are considered the “true ‘constitutional’ principles of the EU”.²¹⁴ Since democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights are at the very heart of the European idea, the EU promises to promote (Article 3 TEU) and to protect these founding values through various instruments. However, especially in the case of Hungary and Poland, the EU has been criticised for not being able to prevent democratic backsliding and protect liberal democracy. In this section, we will therefore argue that there is a significant gap between what the EU says it is doing, is actually doing, and is not doing to uphold and strengthen democracy in its member states.

In her agenda for Europe, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen explicitly placed “a new push for European democracy” as one of the six ‘headline ambitions’ that would shape the Commission’s work programme for the years 2019 to 2024.²¹⁵ By putting emphasis on a more transparent and more inclusive decision-making process, the Commission seems to have heard young Europeans’ calls for more participation and seeks to bring the EU closer to its citizens. Specifically, the Commission aims at giving EU citizens a greater role in decision-making and enhancing the accountability of EU representatives. The Commission President has, for example, indicated her willingness to support a “right of initiative” for the EU Parliament and “to move towards full co-decision power for the European Parliament and away from unanimity for climate, energy, social and taxation policies”.²¹⁶ Moreover, von der Leyen has stated her intention to revise the *Spitzenkandidaten* system and possibly introduce transnational lists in the European elections in order to increase the visibility of European politics.²¹⁷ During her presidency so far, however, little progress has been made in these regards. While the Commission seems committed to its goal of more democratic and efficient action at the European level, it has not yet delivered on these promises, hiding behind the unforeseen Covid-19 pandemic crisis.

High hopes were originally placed on the Conference on the Future of Europe which was launched on 9 May 2021 and is set to reach conclusions within 15 months.²¹⁸ But whether the conference will become a “game changer” that also drives and promotes more citizen participation in the EU may well be doubted. The Conference on the Future of Europe was originally considered as a unique opportunity for the EU to re-engage with its young citizens and to “bring together citizens, [...] civil society and European institutions as equal partners”.²¹⁹ However, so far, the envisaged conference

²¹⁴ Policy Department for Citizens’ Rights and Constitutional Affairs, “The EU framework for enforcing the respect of the rule of law and the Union’s fundamental principles and values”, *European Parliament*, Jan 2019: 8, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/608856/IPOL_STU\(2019\)608856_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/608856/IPOL_STU(2019)608856_EN.pdf).

²¹⁵ Ursula von der Leyen, “A Union that strives for more. My agenda for Europe”, *European Commission*, 2019.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

²¹⁸ Maia de la Baume, “EU finally approves Conference on the Future of Europe”, *Politico*, 10 Mar 2021, <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-leaders-eu-sign-off-conference-on-the-future-of-europe/>.

²¹⁹ von der Leyen, “A Union that strives for more”.

has made headlines mostly for delays, internal disputes over who should become its president, and doubts about whether there is enough time and willingness to really achieve meaningful results.²²⁰ Moreover, the Conference faced considerable criticism for its top-down approach and disagreements among member states concerning the legitimacy of the Conference's outcomes.²²¹ In sum, the Conference on the Future of Europe had already degenerated into an institutional turf war before it even began. Its original ambitious agenda of grassroots engagement with Europe's youth and civil society has been replaced by a bureaucratic organisation under male-dominated leadership of officials wary to bring up the subject of treaty changes. Not surprisingly, 48% of EU citizens say that they are personally unwilling to take part in the event.²²² So, it seems like the EU missed another chance to engage with its (young) citizens.

In the remainder of this section, we would like to highlight what the EU says it is doing and is actually doing with regard to the systematic and persistent violations of the EU's fundamental values in some of its member states. The EU's response can be summarised as follows: It has done too little, reacted too late, and proceeded too weakly against violations of liberal democracy and the rule of law in its member states.²²³

As the "guardian of the treaties", the Commission has put great emphasis in its political guidelines on defending the rule of law, and has reiterated time and again that "breaches of the rule of law cannot be tolerated" and "European values are not for sale."²²⁴ However, the Commission (and the EU in general) has rarely gone beyond this lip service. In her first State of the Union speech, President von der Leyen claimed that "the Commission attaches the highest importance to the rule of law."²²⁵ But in the same speech, she painted a picture which seemed "distressingly detached from reality"²²⁶ by lauding the new 'Annual Rule of Law Report' as a "starting point" to ensure that "there is no backsliding" in the EU.²²⁷ Several leading academics and

²²⁰ see e.g., Mehreen Kahn, "Conference on the Future of Europe risks becoming an orphan project", *Financial Times*, 1 Mar 2021, <https://www.ft.com/content/d2e27ae6-9094-424c-9786-768d767ccfb6>; Mehreen Kahn and David Hindley, "Talking shop at the Conference on the Future of Europe", *Financial Times*, 10 Mar 2021, <https://www.ft.com/content/231dcda1-69c9-45e7-a0c4-7e243212209e>.

²²¹ see e.g., Alberto Alemanno, "Let civil society have its say!", *Voxeurop*, 1 Feb 2021, <https://voxeurop.eu/en/let-civil-society-have-its-say/>; Reneta Shipkova, "Conference on the Future of Europe. Five reasons for moderate pessimism", *Friends of Europe*, 3 Mar 2021, <https://www.friendsofeurope.org/insights/conference-on-the-future-of-europe-five-reasons-for-moderate-pessimism/>.

²²² Directorate-General for Communication, "Special Eurobarometer 500: Future of Europe", *European Commission and European Parliament*, Mar 2021, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/files/be-heard/eurobarometer/2021/future-of-europe-2021/en-results-annex.pdf>.

²²³ e.g., Daniel Kelemen and Kim Lane Scheppele, "How to Stop Funding Autocracy in the EU", *Verfassungsblog*, 10 Sept 2018, <https://verfassungsblog.de/how-to-stop-funding-autocracy-in-the-eu/>.

²²⁴ Ursula von der Leyen, "State of the Union Address by President von der Leyen", *European Commission*, 16 Sep 2020.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

²²⁶ Daniel Kelemen, "You can't fight autocracy with toothless reports", *EU Law Live*, 6 Oct 2020, <https://eulawlive.com/op-ed-you-cant-fight-autocracy-with-toothless-reports-by-roger-daniel-kelemen/>.

²²⁷ von der Leyen, "State of the Union Address".

political commentators have pointed out that speaking of a starting point is preposterous when one considers the numerous breaches of the EU's founding values by the Hungarian and Polish governments.²²⁸ Freedom House has downgraded Poland to a semi-consolidated democracy, and Hungary is no longer classified as a democracy at all.²²⁹ It is worth mentioning that violations of the rule of law can be observed not only in Hungary and Poland but also in other European countries. We do not claim that all is well in other European democracies but “[t]hey have not been captured by single parties trying to remould the entire political system in their favour, as has been the case in Hungary” (and now also Poland).²³⁰ Therefore, special attention is paid to these two most serious cases of democratic backsliding.

It may well be that the new Annual Rule of Law Report, which assesses the situation of the rule of law in all member states and aims to identify rule of law problems early on proves to be a successful tool to detect anti-democratic reforms in countries where illiberal tendencies are *beginning* to unfold, but it is unlikely that this report actually helps to stop or reverse democratic backsliding in the case of Hungary or Poland. Against this backdrop, Daniel Kelemen, professor of political science and law at Rutgers University, aptly stated that “[y]ou can't fight autocracy with toothless reports.”²³¹

The EU has three main mechanisms at its disposal to protect the rule of law and liberal democracy in its member states: the Rule of Law Framework, infringement procedures, and the Article 7 procedure.²³² In the case of Poland, the European Commission brought infringement proceedings before the European Court of Justice, made recommendations under the Rule of Law Framework, and triggered Article 7(1). In this section, we will focus mainly on the latter two mechanisms. The Rule of Law Framework was activated for the first time with respect to Poland in 2016. This procedure seeks to address systemic threats to the rule of law early on and to prevent the activation of Article 7 by recommending early intervention measures. In the case of Poland, this procedure overall proved to be ineffective. The Commission opened a ‘structured dialogue’ with the Polish government and issued several recommendations, but the Polish government clearly disagreed with the Commission's positions and rejected its recommendations. As the Polish government continued to seriously and continuously violate the EU's fundamental values, the Commission initiated the Article 7 procedure against Poland on 20 December 2017. This seeks to determine whether there is a clear *risk* of a serious breach of the values the EU is founded on. Given the lack of progress in the Polish case, the rule of law framework was never even applied to Hungary. In the case of Hungary, the Commission initiated

²²⁸ E.g., Kelemen, “You can't fight autocracy with toothless reports”.

²²⁹ Freedom House, “Nations in Transit 2020”.

²³⁰ Jan-Werner Müller, *What is Populism?*, London: Penguin Books, 2017, 59.

²³¹ *Ibid.*

²³² Besides these three main mechanisms, the EU has further instruments to protect and promote its founding values, such as the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (included in the Act of Accession for Bulgaria and Romania), the EU Anti-Corruption Report, the Justice Scoreboard, or the EU's inter-institutional annual reporting on fundamental rights and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

infringement proceedings, but for a very long time it did not take any meaningful political action against the dismantling of democracy; instead, it relied on appeasement. It was then the European Parliament that triggered Article 7.

Consequently, both Hungary and Poland are currently subject to the preventive arm of the Article 7 procedure. In general, this procedure aims to ensure that all member states respect the EU's founding values and theoretically provides the option to suspend the membership rights of a 'rogue' state (due to the required unanimity, however, this last-resort measure is almost impossible). Both academics and the European Parliament have condemned the Council's inaction with regard to the Article 7 procedure and further criticised that the few hearings that have taken place have not been organised in a regular, structured and transparent manner.²³³ Also, documents relating to the procedure are not systematically made available to the public. In January 2020, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the ongoing hearings, taking to task the Council (and thus the member states) in an unusually direct way: "The failure by the Council to make effective use of Article 7 continues to undermine the integrity of common European values, mutual trust and the credibility of the European Union as a whole."²³⁴ Furthermore, the European Parliament notes that, according to numerous sources, the situation on the ground in both Poland and Hungary has deteriorated since the Article 7 proceedings were triggered.²³⁵ In one of our expert interviews, Rafał Trzaskowski, the current Mayor of Warsaw, echoes this: "Let's put it bluntly, Article 7 is not very effective, and we knew it all along."²³⁶ In sum, it must be said that the EU's most powerful tool (at least on paper) was both triggered too late and is now not being used to the extent that it could be.

Since the beginning of 2021 the EU has another—long-awaited—tool in its toolbox to protect liberal democracy and the rule of law: the rule of law conditionality mechanism which aims to protect the EU budget from governments that violate rule of law standards. For years, many have argued that the only measure that could keep the Hungarian and Polish governments from further eroding the rule of law and democracy would be to make the distribution of EU funds conditional on compliance with the EU's founding values. Both Hungary and Poland expressed fundamental objections to such a conditionality mechanism and in return threatened to veto the EU budget and post-Covid-19 recovery fund. To overcome the threatened Polish and Hungarian veto, the European Council watered down the mechanism and negotiated a compromise in December 2020. This conceded to Hungary and Poland that the

²³³ E.g., Laurent Pech, "From 'Nuclear Option' to Damp Squib?: A Critical Assessment of the Four Article 7(1) TEU Hearings to Date", *Verfassungsblog*, 13 Nov 2019, <https://verfassungsblog.de/from-nuclear-option-to-damp-squib/>; European Parliament, "Ongoing hearings under article 7(1) of the TEU regarding Poland and Hungary", 16 Jan 2020, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2020-0014_EN.html.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

²³⁵ E.g., Laurent Pech, Patryk Wachowiec and Dariusz Mazur, "1825 Days Later: The End of the Rule of Law in Poland (Part I)", *Verfassungsblog*, 13 Jan 2021, <https://verfassungsblog.de/1825-days-later-the-end-of-the-rule-of-law-in-poland-part-i/>.

²³⁶ Europe's Stories, "Interview with Rafał Trzaskowski", *europeanmoments.com*, 2021, <https://europeanmoments.com/stories/rafal-trzaskowski>.

enforcement of the Conditionality Regulation would be delayed until the European Court of Justice issues a ruling on its legality. The new Conditionality Regulation, also known as the “Rule of Law Conditionality Mechanism”, which came into force on 1 January 2021, provides that the Commission can propose to trigger the mechanism against an EU government—but only after detecting a breach of the principles of the rule of law that affects the financial management of the EU budget or the protection of the financial interests of the EU “in a sufficiently direct way”. The Council then has one month to vote by qualified majority on the proposed measures. Subsequently, payments to the errant member state from the EU budget can be reduced or frozen.

Leading academics argue (see our webinar on “Is there still ‘rule of law’ in Hungary and Poland”) that the European Council conclusions, while not formally binding, cast a long shadow over the Conditionality Regulation, making it virtually useless and thus “undermining the rule of law on all fronts.”²³⁷ The final regulation sounds more like the EU wants to defend its budget rather than the rule of law and liberal democracy. The Commission can only intervene if the financial interests of the Union are at risk. However, it may not do so if the violation of the EU’s fundamental values does not affect the Union’s financial or budgetary interests. In addition, it has been pointed out that the EU already possesses means (the Common Provisions Regulation) to suspend the flow of funds to backsliding states in which the rule of law is systematically violated, but that “[t]he real problem to date has not been the lack of adequate legal tools, but the lack of political will on the part of the European Commission to use the tools that already exist.”²³⁸

The Commission has certainly not sufficiently fulfilled its duty as “guardian of the treaties”. Still, we would like to point out that protecting the EU’s fundamental values is a shared responsibility. When we talk about the EU’s response to democratic backsliding, we must also call other member states as well as political parties to account. To date, most states have remained largely silent and exerted little pressure on the rogue states in their midst. In the European Parliament, the European People’s Party (EPP) has long held a protective hand over Orbán’s Fidesz party. Even if it is a partial success that Fidesz has now left the EPP (when its expulsion was imminent), this comes far too late. In sum, there is a significant gap between what the EU says and what it actually does when it comes to safeguarding the rule of law and liberal democracy in its member states.

²³⁷ Europe’s Stories, “Is there still ‘rule of law’ in Hungary and Poland?”, *europeanmoments.com*, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=T4T742riM-A&t=4s>; Kim Lane Scheppele, Laurent Pech and Sébastien Platon, “Compromising the Rule of Law while Compromising on the Rule of Law”, *Verfassungsblog*, 13 Dec 2020, <https://verfassungsblog.de/compromising-the-rule-of-law-while-compromising-on-the-rule-of-law/>.

²³⁸ Kelemen and Scheppele, “How to Stop Funding Autocracy in the EU”.

What we think the EU should do

Building on young Europeans' expectations and the EU's current actions related to democracy and the rule of law, in this section we will present recommendations on the Conference on the Future of Europe, democracy at the EU level and safeguarding democracy at the member state level.

We think that the Conference on the Future of Europe, as it is currently agreed and planned to unfold, risks being a highly disappointing top-down bureaucratic exercise. Its organisation accentuates the belief of young Europeans that the EU is a complex, top-down structured set of institutions in which their voices are not sufficiently heard. ***The Conference on the Future of Europe should adopt a truly bottom-up approach directly involving EU citizens, in particular youth and civil society, in order to have its intended impact.*** We believe that the original intention of the Conference could be reinstated through a central role for civil society organisations, which currently are marginalised. Second, it should feature more inclusive, non-standard, digital forms of public participation and democracy in order to generate meaningful discussions with Europeans.²³⁹ Third, its leading figures should be accompanied by young European citizens and its organisation should emphasise transparency in order to reflect young Europeans' concerns. In the future, we suggest festival-like events that travel across Europe with a strong and forward-looking presence on social media. This set-up would approach new audiences to be reached beyond the usual pro-European suspects. Finally, treaty changes have been clearly sidelined for the moment, but the discussion should remain open and prepare for further arising needs to redirect the constitutional course of the EU. It would be foolish to suppress the need for conversation about treaty revisions that has arisen from European citizens themselves.

At the EU level, we believe that more support should be provided for pan-European initiatives that nurture a "European public sphere" in order to encourage more grassroots discussions about democracy in Europe. Public spheres must be connected not only supranationally (at the EU level) but also trans-nationally (between member states). With this in mind, building on the *DiscoverEU* programme, ***an interrail pass should be given to every EU citizen turning 16 without an application process, valid for five years within the European Union.*** Media initiatives breaking language barriers such as Forum.eu should be further encouraged. The different national perspectives on European history, philosophy, politics and economy should be better integrated in school curricula, which currently widely vary across the continent. As explained

²³⁹ Keane conceptualises this idea as "monitory democracy", which he defines as a form of democracy in which "potentially *all fields of social and political life* come to be publicly scrutinised, not just by the standard machinery of representative democracy, but by a whole host of *non-party, extra-parliamentary and often unelected bodies* operating within, underneath and beyond the boundaries of territorial states. [...] it is as if the principles of representative democracy – public openness, citizens' equality, selecting representatives – are superimposed on representative democracy itself" (Keane, *Democracy and Media Decadence*).

by a professor of interlinguistics, “[i]t’s not neutral. If you study history in English you have the English point of view. If you study that in Dutch you have the Dutch point of view, that’s very different.”²⁴⁰

Furthermore, *civic education and media literacy should be included in the programme of all schools across Europe* in order to foster critical democratic thinking and a better understanding of the EU, as well as to debunk the often simplistic arguments of populists. In his *Eight Remarks on Populism*, Ralf Dahrendorf stated: “Populism is easy, democracy is complex. [...] Learning to live with complexity may be the most significant task of democratic civic education.”²⁴¹ Strategic communication should thus be a priority for the EU, not only in its foreign but also internal policies. Additionally, *the EU should substantially boost the Erasmus+ programme* as its activities clearly accelerate citizens’ identification with the EU and sharpen their interest and participation in democratic activities. It should be better promoted *within* the EU, particularly among educationally disadvantaged groups and early on in the educational system. Initiatives that allow for the exchanges of teachers and inter-school collaboration should also be given more attention. Finally, it should include further opportunities for direct connection and debate at the local level, similarly to initiatives led in the EU’s neighbourhood such as the *Young European Ambassadors*.

A central question remains: What do we want the EU to do about its most pressing democratic threat—democratic backsliding in its member states? First of all, we would like European officials to *stop talking only about a “rule of law crisis” when it is actually liberal democracy that is under attack*. The EU has framed most of its activities as measures to “protect the rule of law”. Undoubtedly, the rule of law is being violated in some of its member states—notably in Poland and Hungary. However, we agree with Jan-Werner Müller that the “virtually exclusive emphasis on rule of law in public discourse has, arguably, reinforced the sense that Europe only cares about liberalism, while the nation-state does democracy.”²⁴² Therefore, the EU needs to make clear that it stands up for democracy and safeguards free and fair elections, freedom of expression (including media and academic freedom), freedom of association, and human rights in its member states.

At this point, we call on the European Union to protect democracy from illiberalism in Hungary and Poland. We firmly believe that “illiberal democracy” is a contradiction in terms and opposed to the founding values of the EU. As we have seen in the previous section, the European Union has a rich toolbox to safeguard liberal democracy and the rule of law. We believe that it is high time that the EU finally uses these instruments properly and backs up its words with deeds.

²⁴⁰ Europe’s Stories, “Interview with Federico Gobbo”, *europeanmoments.com*, 2021, <https://europeanmoments.com/stories/federico-gobbo>.

²⁴¹ Ralf Dahrendorf, *Eight Remarks on Populism*, 2003: 16.

²⁴² Müller, *What is Populism?*, 58-59.

We would like *the Council to resume organising hearings under the Article 7 procedure and conduct those in a regular, structured and public manner*. The Article 7 procedure is often wrongly considered as the EU's "nuclear option".²⁴³ However, the preventive arm of this procedure (Art. 7(1) TEU), to which both Poland and Hungary are subject, is anything but "nuclear"—its means are warnings, dialogue and recommendations, not sanctions.²⁴⁴ Therefore, we see no reason why the Council should not proceed with the hearings and exert public pressure on the Hungarian and Polish governments.

We call on *the European Commission to make use of the new rule of law conditionality mechanism in a timely manner and not to wait for the ECJ's ruling* on this issue. Given that the Hungarian and Polish governments are obviously trying to stall for time, the Commission must be careful not to make the same mistake again and apply its instruments only when it is already too late, as happened with the Article 7 procedure. Furthermore, we hope that the European Commission will interpret the new rule of law conditionality broadly and use it not only to protect the EU budget from rule of law violations but also to protect liberal democracy.

We call on *other member states and major groups in the European Parliament to take a clear stance on the erosion of democracy in member states*. Both Fidesz and PiS (i.e., the ruling parties in Hungary and Poland) should be politically shunned and their violations of the rule of law and democratic values condemned. We expect member states to finally take their responsibility and put pressure on backsliding member states, be it through embassies, "naming and shaming", or through legal actions. Given the severity of violations in Hungary and Poland, *member states should finally make use of Article 259 of the Treaty of the European Union* which allows them to sue another member state which "has failed to fulfil an obligation under the Treaties" before the Court of Justice of the European Union.²⁴⁵ In this regard, we welcome the resolution of the Dutch Parliament urging the Dutch government—instead of waiting any longer for the Commission—to take Poland to the ECJ.

In addition to these recommendations, which relate to tools already available, we have two further recommendations for new policies. Firstly, we believe that the EU should *create a substantial EU fund for the defence of media freedom* across the continent. Thus, we welcome current discussions of a European Media Freedom Act. Secondly, we call on the EU to *allocate funding from the EU recovery fund directly to regional and local governments* to avoid them being dependent on the goodwill of central governments. Bypassing national governments by allocating EU funds directly to municipalities should help to empower Warsaw and Budapest, and thus to strengthen the democratic opposition in Hungary and Poland. This could help to punish the Hungarian government, without hurting Hungarians.

²⁴³ José Manuel Barroso, "State of the Union address 2013", *European Commission*, 2013.

²⁴⁴ Kim Lane Scheppele and Laurent Pech, "Is Article 7 really the EU's 'Nuclear Option'?", *Verfassungsblog*, 6 Mar 2018, <https://verfassungsblog.de/is-article-7-really-the-eus-nuclear-option/>.

²⁴⁵ Dimitry Kochenov, "Biting Intergovernmentalism: the case for the reinvention of article 259 TFEU to make it a viable rule of law enforcement tool", *The Hague Journal on the Rule of Law* 7, no. 2, (2015): 153-174, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40803-015-0019-1>.

To sum up, we expect much clearer action from the EU showing that it does not tolerate any illiberal, semi-consolidated democracy in its community. Many tools are already available; now is the time to use them. Especially after the Covid-19 pandemic, European citizens seem ready for change more than ever. Democracy and the rule of law will not defend themselves, they need defenders. We have shown that young Europeans value the EU precisely because it champions the rule of law, liberal democracy, and human rights within and beyond its borders. It is now up to the European Union to ensure that the “community of values” does not degenerate into an empty phrase.

6. Europe in the World

Olivier de France and Marianna Lovato

What young Europeans want EUrope to do

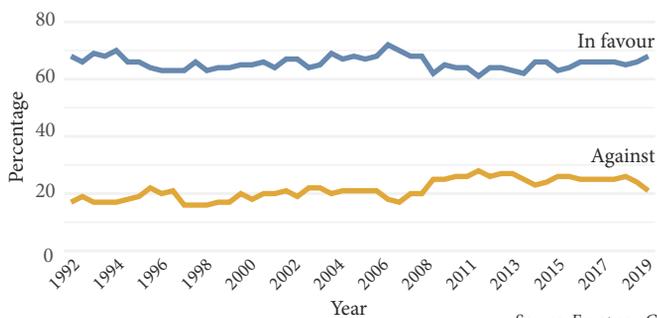
When it comes to common external action, younger and older Europeans alike favour stronger European cooperation—but the devil is in the detail. Support for a common foreign policy has remarkably remained constant across time and across age groups, suggesting that there are no major age, period or cohort effects at play (Figure 22).

The idea of a common EU foreign policy has remained strikingly popular throughout continued enlargement rounds (EU12, EU15, EU27, EU28), 9/11, the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya, the financial crisis, US strategic rebalancing, and the latest populist and isolationist trends. There is, however, some evidence of an age or cohort effect when it comes to enlargement: while in 2019 the average support for extending EU membership to other countries was around 44%, 60% of young Europeans aged 15-24 were in favour.²⁴⁶

Figure 22

European citizens consistently in favour of a common EU foreign policy

What is your opinion on each of the following statements? Please tell me for each statement whether you are for it or against it. "A common foreign policy of the 28 member states of the EU (% - EU)"



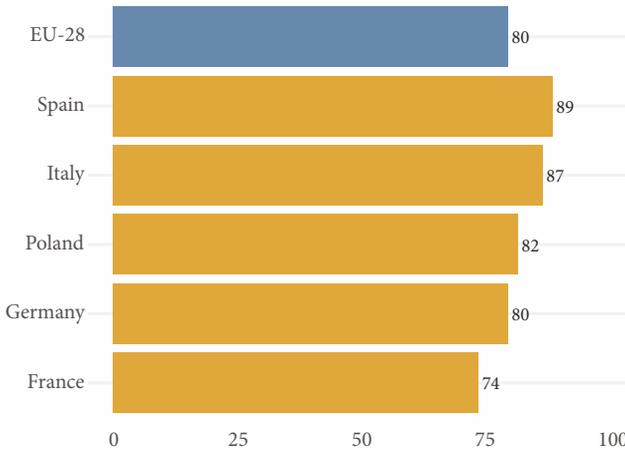
Source: European Commission, 2019²⁴⁷

²⁴⁶ Directorate-General for Communication, “Standard Eurobarometer 92: Europeans’ opinions about the European Union’s priorities”, *European Commission*, Autumn 2019, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/33119d82-f3d4-11ea-991b-01aa75ed71a1/>.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 102.

Figure 23

Percentage who believe the EU should play a more active role in global affairs



Source: *eupinions*, 2017²⁴⁸

Even though some countries are more supportive of a common foreign policy than others—only a small majority in Ireland, the UK, Finland and Sweden, but over 75% in France, Germany, Benelux, Visegrád and Baltic countries—most Europeans favour more coherent European foreign policy.

The qualitative interviews we carried out reflect widespread support for a common EU foreign policy and a more assertive Union on the global stage. David Gill, Consulate General at the German Consulate in New York, stated that he would like to see “Europe as a strong, self-confident, determined entity in world policy.”²⁴⁹ Similarly, Sylvie Kauffmann, editorial director of *Le Monde*, told us: “one thing I would really like the European Union to progress towards is to have a common foreign policy.”²⁵⁰ Robert Grzeszczak, professor of European Law at the University of Warsaw, adds that “the goal for us, for the future in ten years, is to create a real foreign policy. The (unified) foreign policy will be a signal for other states that the European Union really is a Union.”²⁵¹ Not only do most EU citizens support a common foreign policy, but they also agree that the EU should strive to play a much more influential role in global affairs (Figure 23).

²⁴⁸ Catherine E. de Vries and Isabell Hoffmann, “A Source of Stability?”, *eupinions*, 6 Sep 2017, <https://eupinions.eu/de/text/a-source-of-stability>.

²⁴⁹ Europe’s Stories, “Interview with David Gill”, *europeanmoments.com*, 2021, <https://europeanmoments.com/stories/david-gill>.

²⁵⁰ Europe’s Stories, “Interview with Sylvie Kauffmann”, *europeanmoments.com*, 2021, <https://europeanmoments.com/stories/sylvie-kauffmann>.

²⁵¹ Europe’s Stories, “Interview with Robert Grzeszczak”, *europeanmoments.com*, 2020, <https://europeanmoments.com/interviewees/robert>.

“The goal for us, for the future in ten years, is to create a real foreign policy”

But while a more influential EU on the global stage is desirable in theory, it is not always a priority—particularly among the younger generations. The top five priorities listed by young Europeans (aged 15-30) include fighting climate change (67%), improving education and training (56%), fighting poverty as well as economic and social inequalities (56%), creating jobs (49%) and improving health and well-being (44%). Only 28% of young Europeans seem to think that ensuring the EU’s security and defence should be a paramount concern (see Figure 14 p52).²⁵²

Most EU citizens tend to agree that the EU is a place of stability in a troubled world, even though there is variation across the EU27. Though the overwhelming majority of respondents in Portugal, Luxembourg and Denmark find the EU to be a stabilising force (87%, 82% and 81% respectively), only 56% of Italian and Czech citizens do so.²⁵³ As we have seen, when asked to name the most important thing that the EU has done for them, young Europeans rank freedom of travel as the most significant contribution, with the freedom to live, work and study in EU states coming in second. Peace and security come third, with only 13% of respondents choosing it as the first option.²⁵⁴

As such, foreign and security policy does not rank among the highest priorities for Europeans—young or old. The different strategic identities and foreign policy cultures across Europe also result in significant disagreement as to what a common European foreign policy would entail in practice. Traditional fractures emerge as soon as more tangible aspects are considered, including non-secondary issues such as the aims of a common foreign and security policy (e.g. operational capabilities, decision-making structures or industrial cooperation in the field of defence). Interventionist member states find themselves at odds with neutral countries such as Ireland or Austria, Atlanticist Baltic countries consider French moves for greater strategic autonomy as threatening to Nato, and smaller member states fear cooperation between larger member states’ defence industries.

Diverging European stances vis-à-vis third countries—most prominently the US and China—also tend to cripple the EU’s ability to adopt coherent policy positions. When it comes to China, European capitals’ bilateral relations with Beijing tend to vary markedly, featuring more or less prominently in EU member states’ domestic foreign policy debates.²⁵⁵ Poland, for instance, prioritises the EU and the US over China. Warsaw

²⁵² Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Directorate-General for Communication, “Flash Eurobarometer 478: How do we build a stronger, more united Europe? The views of young people”, *European Commission*, Apr 2019, https://data.europa.eu/data/datasets/s2224_478_eng?locale=en.

²⁵³ Directorate-General for Communication, “Special Eurobarometer 486: Europeans in 2019”.

²⁵⁴ Garton Ash *et al.*, 26 Jan 2021.

²⁵⁵ Ulrike Franke and Tara Varma, “Independence play: Europe’s pursuit of strategic autonomy”, *ECFR Flash Scorecard*, 18 Jul 2019, https://ecfr.eu/special/independence_play_europes_pursuit_of_strategic_autonomy/.

is happy to rely on the EU-China Strategic Partnership framework to guide its relations with Beijing. Countries like Spain and Bulgaria are attracted by the opportunities stemming from exports to a fast-recovering Chinese economy, all the while being wary of dependence on the Chinese market. Italy has been eager to catch up with Germany and France in attracting Chinese investment, though the efforts have not paid off and the country struggles to find a domestic political consensus. France is among those pushing for a pan-European approach to China, which takes into account, among other things, Beijing's human rights violations as well as its role as a major development donor and economic behemoth.²⁵⁶ Ultimately, there is no consolidated consensus as to whether China is a strategic rival or partner (or both).²⁵⁷ The increased wariness and scepticism towards Beijing following the Covid-19 pandemic might just provide Brussels with momentum to establish a common EU strategic approach to China.

The picture is hardly more homogenous when it comes to EU member states' views of the transatlantic relationship. Some capitals favour strong engagement with Washington beyond security (Dublin, Stockholm and Amsterdam among them), others would like to keep the focus of transatlantic relations on security, while others still are pushing for disengagement and greater European autonomy, Paris and Berlin included.²⁵⁸ Some member states value the US and Nato security umbrella more than others, which means that they also disagree on the extent to which American concerns should matter to the EU. Remarkably, while more than half of EU citizens think that the Union shares common economic interests with Washington, only 22% of EU citizens believe their country shares similar values with the US.²⁵⁹

In short, the polling suggests that the EU should pursue increased global leadership, but foreign policy is of little importance to most Europeans—especially among the younger generations. European citizens are keen to have a common foreign policy, but are wary of the associated constraints, like increased defence budgets and military interventions abroad. They are happy for the perks of global leadership to fall their way, but without the unpalatable responsibilities that come with it. Moreover, the different strategic outlooks and foreign policy traditions of 27 different member states, which encompass key issues such as EU-China and EU-US relations, stand in the way of a more effective EU in the world.

Despite broad support for a common European foreign policy that extends across cohorts and generations, much of that support erodes and national interest often prevails in the face of the costs and constraints of such a common foreign policy.

²⁵⁶ Janka Oertel, "The new China consensus: How Europe is growing wary of Beijing", *ECFR Policy Brief*, 7 Sep 2020, https://ecfr.eu/publication/the_new_china_consensus_how_europe_is_growing_wary_of_beijing/.

²⁵⁷ Claire Busse, Ulrike Franke, Rafael Loss, Jana Puglierin, Marlene Riedel and Pawel Zerka, "Policy Intentions Mapping" *ECFR Special*, 8 Jul 2020, https://ecfr.eu/special/eucoalitionexplorer/policy_intentions_mapping/.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁹ Catherine de Vries and Isabell Hoffmann, "Together apart", *eupinions*, 28 Oct 2020, <https://eupinions.eu/de/text/together-apart>.

Finally, young Europeans prioritise environmental, educational and socioeconomic issues over foreign policy. Over the past decade the EU has nonetheless made some progress in advancing the Union's global role.

What the EU is and is not doing

In his 2018 State of the Union address, Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker declared that “the hour of European sovereignty” had come: the EU was to live up to its global responsibilities and exercise its ability to shape the world (*Weltpolitikfähigkeit*) by becoming a more autonomous player.²⁶⁰ The current Commission's six key priorities for 2019-2024 include building a stronger Europe in the world, initiating a new push for democracy and promoting the European way of life.²⁶¹

As part of the first goal, current Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has expressed her commitment to lead a “geopolitical” Commission.²⁶² Josep Borrell, the EU foreign policy chief, declared that the EU must learn to speak the “language of power” and to act alone to pursue its interests if necessary.²⁶³ In November of 2020, von der Leyen vowed to take “further bold steps in the next five years towards a genuine European Defence Union”, in order to continue the progress made by her predecessor.²⁶⁴

Beyond the rhetoric, both the Juncker and von der Leyen Commissions have started putting the EU's money where its mouth is. The 2016 EU Global Strategy is an attempt at guiding current common EU foreign policy. EU member states thereafter agreed on the Strategy's Implementation Plan, which established a number of decision-making tools and capability goals necessary for conducting a common foreign policy. As part of this effort to boost Europe's influence in global affairs, the Commission launched the European Defence Fund (EDF) in 2017.²⁶⁵ The EDF helps members define their defence needs and coordinate throughout the industrial cycle—including research, development of prototypes, and eventually, the acquisition of defence capabilities. Ambitious cooperative defence projects are thus jointly funded by the EU and the individual member states. In 2017, 25 member states joined the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), which creates a framework for those member states

²⁶⁰ Jean-Claude Juncker, “President Jean-Claude Juncker's State of the Union Address 2018”, *European Commission*, 12 Sep 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_18_5808.

²⁶¹ European Commission, “The European Commission's priorities”, *European Commission*, 16 Jul 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024_en.

²⁶² Ursula von der Leyen, “Speech by President-elect von der Leyen in the European Parliament Plenary on the occasion of the presentation of her College of Commissioners and their programme”, *European Commission*, 27 Nov 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_19_6408.

²⁶³ Josep Borrell, “Hearing with High Representative/Vice President-designate Josep Borrell”, *European Parliament*, 7 Oct 2019, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20190926IPR62260/hearing-with-high-representative-vice-president-designate-josep-borrell>.

²⁶⁴ Ursula von der Leyen, “State of the Union Address by President von der Leyen at the European Parliament Plenary”, *European Commission*, 16 Sep 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_20_1655.

²⁶⁵ European Commission, “Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs”, *European Commission*, Jun 2017, https://ec.europa.eu/growth/sectors/defence/european-defence-fund_en.

that are willing and able to cooperate more closely in the field of security and defence.²⁶⁶ A complementary initiative to both the EDF and PESCO is the Coordinated Annual Review of Defence (CARD). The main aim of CARD is to provide a regular assessment of member states' defence capabilities, identify any strategic capability gaps and suggest areas for potential cooperation at the EU level.²⁶⁷

In the wake of the 2016 EU Global Strategy, member states also agreed on the establishment of the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC), de facto creating "a small cell working as an EU defence command".²⁶⁸ The MPCC oversees operational planning and conduct of non-executive military operations, such as the EU Training Missions in Somalia, Mali and the Central African Republic.²⁶⁹

Additionally, when von der Leyen took office in 2019, a new Directorate-General for Defence Industry and Space (DG Defis) was instituted to oversee the management and implementation of the EDF and the EU Space Programmes—such as the Galileo satellite navigation system and the Copernicus Earth observation system.²⁷⁰ A concrete step towards the creation of a geopolitical Commission, the new DG is indicative of a qualitative shift in the Commission's role in the area of security and defence. More recently, the EU adopted the European Peace Facility, an off-budget fund worth approximately €5 billion for the period 2021-2027, to be financed through contributions from EU member states. Improving upon previous financial instruments, the European Peace Facility creates one single instrument to finance EU foreign policy operations and missions in the defence field.²⁷¹

To ensure coherence among all these different tools, the Council has decided to draft a Strategic Compass, which is to be completed by 2022. The Compass should provide guidance for the consistent use of existing initiatives and define policy orientations, specific goals and objectives in areas such as crisis management, resilience and capability development.²⁷²

²⁶⁶ Alessandro Marrone, "Permanent Structured Cooperation: An Institutional Pathway for European Defence", *IAI*, Nov 2017, <https://www.iai.it/en/publicazioni/permanent-structured-cooperation-institutional-pathway-european-defence>.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁸ Jean-Pierre Darnis, "The Future of EU Defence: A European Space, Data and Cyber Agency?" *IAI Commentaries*, Oct 2017, <https://www.iai.it/en/publicazioni/permanent-structured-cooperation-institutional-pathway-european-defence>.

²⁶⁹ Council of the EU, "EU defence cooperation: Council establishes a Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC)", *Council of the EU press release*, 8 Jun 2017, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/06/08/military-mpcc-planning-conduct-capability/>.

²⁷⁰ Directorate-General Defense Industry and Space, "Strategic Plan 2020-2024", *European Commission*, Sep 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/info/system/files/defis_sp_2020_2024_en.pdf.

²⁷¹ European External Action Service, "Questions & Answers: The European Peace Facility", *European Commission*, 22 Mar 2021, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/46286/questions-answers-european-peace-facility_en.

²⁷² Council of the European Union, "Council Conclusions on Security and Defence", *Council of the European Union*, 17 Jun 2020, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/44521/st08910-en20.pdf>.

The EU has also made progress beyond the field of foreign and security policy proper. For instance, it is flexing its regulatory muscles by adopting standard-setting measures such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and is leveraging its trade power to assert its interest vis-à-vis China.²⁷³ The Comprehensive Agreement on Investment adopted in December 2020 shows as much. In principle, the trade deal should help balance the EU–China trade relations by allowing EU companies to compete on a level playing field against Chinese state-owned companies and reducing barriers to entry in certain sectors (e.g. eliminating joint-venture requirements), such as manufacturing, financial services and air transport.²⁷⁴ In turn, the EU is using the Agreement to put pressure on China with respect to both its sustainable development commitments - such as those contained in the 2015 Paris Agreement - and international labour standards. (However, there is now serious doubt as to whether it will finally come into force.)

While there are still differences (regarding the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, for instance), the EU27 have also been uncommonly disciplined and united in their positions on Russian sanctions, and most agree on the necessary conditions to lift them.²⁷⁵ After Russo-Ukrainian tensions rose again in the spring of 2021, European unity and solidarity was put to the test on this front.²⁷⁶

Despite the progress made towards strengthening the EU's global influence, there are critical steps that the EU is not taking. The latest seven-year budget attests to Brussels' commitment to combating climate change and investing in digital innovation. The budget allocated to Europe and its neighbourhood, however, was cut from the initial €118 billion proposed to €98 billion—despite featuring in the Commission's stated priorities for 2019-2024.²⁷⁷ More broadly, despite the headway made over the last decade, genuine European strategic autonomy—including the decision-making tools required to act efficiently and expeditiously—is not in sight. The Covid-19 pandemic has shown the extent to which disagreement between EU member states, coupled with limited powers in the hands of the Commission, make for a dependent and slow European Union.

Nor did the Commission's endeavours on vaccine export controls meet a better fate in Northern Ireland. They sparked outrage on both sides of the Irish border and forced Ursula von der Leyen into a humiliating about-face. They were reminiscent of the

²⁷³ Thomas Raines, "Raise the Bar by Leveraging the EU's Regulatory Power", *Chatham House*, 12 Jun 2019, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2019/06/raise-bar-leveraging-eus-regulatory-power>.

²⁷⁴ Philippe Le Corre, "Europe's Tightrope Diplomacy on China", *Carnegie*, 24 Mar 2021, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/03/24/europe-s-tightrope-diplomacy-on-china-pub-84159>.

²⁷⁵ Kadri Liik, "Winning the normative war with Russia: An EU-Russia Power Audit", *ECFR Policy Brief*, 21 May 2019, https://ecfr.eu/publication/winning_the_normative_war_with_russia_an_eu_russia_power_audit/.

²⁷⁶ BBC, "Russian 'troop build-up' near Ukraine alarms Nato", *BBC News*, 2 Apr 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-56616778>.

²⁷⁷ Nathalie Tocci, "European Strategic Autonomy: What It Is, Why We Need It, How to Achieve It", *Instituto Affari Internazionali*, 26 Feb 2021, <https://www.iai.it/en/pubblicazioni/european-strategic-autonomy-what-it-is-why-we-need-it-how-achieve-it>.

Commission's Association Agreement with Ukraine insofar as they seemed to come from an economic perspective and, paradoxically for a geopolitical Commission, disregard the political and geopolitical consequences.

Finally, turf wars between the various EU institutions have long been rampant, and they sporadically cause harm to the EU's international credibility. At an April 2021 EU–Turkey summit in Ankara, Commission President von der Leyen was blindsided, “when European Council president Charles Michel and Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan sat in armchairs next to each other—leaving her to sit alone on a sofa”.²⁷⁸ Apart from the image of inherent sexism it projects, such display of internal divisions among EU institutional figures provide partners and rivals with a sense that the EU is weak and divided. Even when it is one single EU figure that should confront international crises, there too the Union is still struggling to assert itself. This lingering weakness could not have emerged more starkly than during High Representative Joseph Borrell's unfortunate trip to Russia in February 2021.²⁷⁹ Lacking the necessary mandate from the EU27, Borrell was incapable of responding to Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov's dismissal of the EU as an “unreliable partner”, exposing Brussels to ridicule and feeding into an old narrative about the EU's diplomatic inexperience. High-stakes diplomacy still proves difficult for EU representatives who lack any actual leverage to force the hand of partners and rivals alike. On the whole, however, former Belgian Foreign Minister Mark Eyskens' pronouncement that Europe is “an economic giant, a political dwarf and a military worm” does not ring as true today as it might have in the 1990s.

What we think the EU should do

The EU and its institutions have recently sought to position themselves as ‘geopolitical’ actors. Alas, while the narrative may help focus minds in theory, it has also come up against a string of disheartening setbacks in practice. In the short term, Europe should either strive to fulfil its geopolitical ambitions in practice, or consider toning down its overarching rhetoric and underlying assumptions.

The past few years have also exposed some of Europe's underlying weaknesses. From the continent's industrial dependency on China to its legal vulnerability to US secondary sanctions; from its over-reliance on Russian energy exports to its lack of muscle in technological innovation, there is a slew of paralysing capability gaps that hamper the credibility of the EU's external action. In response, Europe should first acknowledge that, from Personal Protective Equipment to 5G and from drones to semiconductors, there is no aspect of everyday life in Europe that does not involve an external element.

²⁷⁸ Ayla Jean Yackley and Michael Peel, “EU-Turkey in blame game over ‘sofagate’ after Ursula von der Leyen left standing”, *Financial Times*, 8 Apr 2021, <https://www.ft.com/content/95451ed1-a676-4b4a-ab71-8282fdc96d6e>.

²⁷⁹ Matthew Karnitschnig, “EU foreign policy RIP”, *Politico*, 13 Feb 2021, <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-foreign-policy-rip/>.

In place of generic foreign policy ambitions, this should push Europe to identify the specific, tangible areas it wishes to shape in technological, ecological, industrial or military terms—and conversely locate more clearly those in which it is happy to choose its dependencies. From there, the EU should make sure it is in the position of having a hand in shaping these areas, as opposed to meekly charting the path that is leading Europeans into a world that changes on the whim of other powers. To adapt Radek Sikorski’s famous statement on German foreign policy, we fear European power less than we are starting to fear European inactivity.²⁸⁰

In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, a political consensus appears to have solidified around the notion of strategic autonomy, including in capitals that previously shunned the concept as French grand strategy. On the consistent and enduring evidence that Europeans call for a more influential Union and a common EU foreign policy, we think that the EU should seriously commit to the goal of strategic European autonomy in theory and practice. This means that the EU should have capacity for autonomous action and the decision-making tools to guarantee it. Strategic autonomy would allow the EU to be a better Nato ally, a more influential actor within multilateral institutions and a more autonomous player, free and able to pursue its interests when necessary. Joint procurement and greater interoperability across the EU27 armies would enable EU member states to build up the capabilities that the US has long been demanding.

Critically, strategic autonomy does not mean that the EU should—or, indeed, will—act alone, but simply that it should be prepared to do so to pursue its interests.²⁸¹ A Europe that is better able to leverage its capabilities will be a better champion of multilateralism and a more effective partner for the United Nations as well as regional organisations, from the OSCE to the African Union. A more capable and autonomous EU would also be a more influential player in its own neighbourhood. With the US mainly preoccupied with domestic issues and its rivalry with China, the EU must also engage more effectively in its neighbourhood, starting from the Western Balkans, which are moving away from the *acquis communautaire* and closer to ‘stabilocracy’. Governance in the Western Balkans is drawing increasingly on “the Chinese and Russian models of authoritarian capitalism, based on predatory state behaviour, state capture and corruption.”²⁸²

Europe should go further and ask itself whether it has a strategic story that resonates both at home and across the world. Is it a Europe of peace? A prosperous Europe? A sponsor of effective multilateralism and global governance? A green superpower? An actor committed to protecting the global commons to protect the citizens of the EU? A combination of all the above? At the very least Europe should seek to clarify the notion of Europe as a ‘geopolitical’ actor. For the greater part of its history, the EU’s very specificity lay in the fact that it was the *anti-geopolitical* actor *par excellence*. It

²⁸⁰ Radosław Sikorski, “Speech to the Allianz Forum”, *DGAP*, 28 Nov 2011, <https://dgap.org/en/events/i-fear-german-power-less-german-inaction>.

²⁸¹ As Nathalie Tocci has pointed out, autonomy “does not necessarily entail is independence, and still less unilateralism or autarky” (in Tocci, “European Strategic Autonomy”).

²⁸² *Ibid.*

was built to overcome the worst effects of geopolitics on European soil, and to mitigate the more egregious consequences born of zero-sum approaches outside of Europe. In doing so, Europe should take more care to factor in the perceptions of the younger generations of Europeans, who—among other things—do not place as great an emphasis on hard borders.

Indeed, our polling and webinars suggest no solid consensus exists amongst Europeans, young and old, around the idea of Europe as a typical geopolitical superpower. Across generations, the data is skewed instead towards Europe as a green, civilian superpower. We therefore think the EU should remain a strong sponsor of multilateralism, rely on alliances and continue acting from within international organisations. But it should not shy away either from leveraging its economic, regulatory and trade power against strategic rivals and competitors—mindful though it should be of power asymmetries when engaging with less powerful negotiating partners. While Europe may have been comfortable advocating for multilateralism in an American-led global order, for example, should it remain so in the context of a Chinese-led multilateralism?

In short, Europe should craft a distinctive strategic story for the 21st century. Beyond the EU's work on the "Strategic Compass" and some deeply rooted differences in threat perception, Europe should work on a positive European understanding of where common interests lie. To achieve this, the continent must chart a course between bottom-up strategic cacophony and top-down euphony by folding the rich patchwork of national perceptions into a strategic polyphony of common interests.²⁸³

As a civilian superpower, Europe needs a story that allows it to uphold its common interests, but within the limits of its own model and the constraints of its own history. A model that does away with the imperial past of geopolitics, but which nonetheless allows the EU to defend its common interests and shared values in a world of private and public superpowers. A language that goes beyond elite foreign policy 'narratives' and allows it to lead the way in charting a course that is more inclusive and less extractive—but nevertheless empowers the EU to persistently defend its choices when they are threatened. A toolbox that can achieve a strong common external policy—but does not overlook the fact that Europe lives in a world that is no longer Eurocentric. It remains for Europe to weave these different dimensions into coherent and convincing political discourse.

Overall, there is little Europeans can do without a global Europe. Recognising that nothing that concerns people's everyday life in Europe is devoid of an external dimension can contribute to a strategic story, as opposed to an elite foreign policy narrative that better resonates with European citizens. As a green civilian superpower,

²⁸³ For a discussion of the concept, see Olivier de France and Nick Witney, "Europe's Strategic Cacophony", *ECFR Policy Brief*, 25 Apr 2013, https://ecfr.eu/publication/europes_strategic_cacophony205/; and Hugo Meijer and Marco Wyss, "L'impossible renaissance de la défense européenne: généalogie d'une cacophonie stratégique", *Le Grand Continent*, 2019, <https://www.sciencespo.fr/ceri/fr/content/l-impossible-renaissance-de-la-defense-europeenne-genealogie-d-une-cacophonie-strategique-0>.

Europe might seek to reunite and reconcile the protection of the environment, the protection of its citizens and the protection of the European project. It should argue that all three dimensions are mutually reinforcing. In short, and to capture it in metaphorical terms, Europe's strategic story should aim to fashion a middle ground between the image of the original princess Europa, passively kidnapped in Titian's painting, and the *Europa Regina* of Sebastian Münster's sixteenth century prints, in which Queen Europe is represented, orb and sceptre in hand, as the aggressive promoter of the faith.

“Europe might seek to reunite and reconcile the protection of the environment, the protection of its citizens and the protection of the European project”

Lastly, Europe should be in a position to rally around the red lines that come from its shared values and fold them into this distinctive strategic story. As suggested in Chapter 5, it should focus on the values that it can credibly defend—in particular, those legally enshrined in the treaties. Defining such red lines will only be helpful, however, if the EU is prepared to stick to them, and knows where and when to defend them. If the EU is serious about defending its own red lines in a pluralist world that has provincialised Europe, then it should act accordingly vis-à-vis China and Russia, but also where necessary with the United States—all regional powers with their own red lines. Initiatives such as the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment might be a first step towards leveraging the Single Market not just against weaker trade partners,²⁸⁴ but against superpowers that consistently disregard human rights. Similarly, the proposal for an EU Border Carbon Adjustment Mechanism, a tool not too dissimilar from a CO₂ tariff on imported products, would help put pressure on third countries to curb their greenhouse gas emissions.²⁸⁵ Europe's red lines should include the fight for democratic values and human rights as well as a strong commitment to battling climate change.

Europe as a green civilian superpower has the potential to accommodate both its interests and values, by setting and protecting its red lines of its own, as and when they are threatened. Young Europeans place great emphasis on certain common values particularly the promotion of democracy, the freedom to travel, the protection of LGBTQ+ rights, the fight against climate change and a dislike of both internal and external borders. Visibly standing up for such values would contribute to making sure Europe's story resonates in practice with coming generations—both the millennials of “Generation Z” and the “Generation C” of baby-zoomers shaped by

²⁸⁴ The EU's tendency to follow a carrot-and-stick approach vis-à-vis many developing countries has been highlighted, among others, by Sophie Meunier and Kalypso Nicolaidis, “The European Union as a conflicted trade power”, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 13 no. 6, (2006): 906-925, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13501760600838623>.

²⁸⁵ Jan Cernicky, “Trade and Environment: The Prospects of a Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism”, *ISPI*, 18 Mar 2021, <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publicazione/trade-and-environment-prospects-carbon-border-adjustment-mechanism-29579#n1>.

the coronavirus pandemic. The range of these issues will be further explored in the next phase of the Europe's Stories project, which will focus on 'Europe in a changing world'.

To conclude, we would highlight four of our suggestions as follows. ***The EU should curb its damaging institutional infighting and be more prepared to look at issues from the outside in—rather than from Brussels out.***

The European Union must steer clear of the inflated rhetoric that risks discrediting the Union's reputation on the world stage, when it is not matched by concrete results. ***The EU should strive instead to under-promise and over-deliver in its international commitments.***

In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, Europe's political consensus has rallied around the notion of strategic autonomy. EU member states and institutions should push ahead and act on this consensus. ***As Europe transitions from the role of reactive strategic spectator to that of proactive global actor, it should endow itself in practice with the requisite degree of strategic, technological and industrial autonomy.***

Finally, ***Europe should craft a distinctive strategic story which insists on its role as a green civilian superpower fit for 21st century purpose.*** It is a story that would help uphold common values, defend shared interests, and also allow Europe to nurture a global outlook. In turn, it would fortify the Old Continent's specific voice on the world stage as a strategic actor with a singular past but an uplifting future. This story draws on a polyphony of European voices, cultures and generations. It is intuitively in tune with the preoccupations of young Europeans, and therefore more intuitively in tune with Europe's future.

7. Synergies and Trade-Offs

Lucas Tse

Four rounds of polling, some 200 interviews and six analytical chapters later, what are we to conclude about the voices of young Europeans? Young Europeans do not speak with a single voice. In producing this report we have listened to the ways in which they agree and disagree, on principles as well as on practices. What people express as aspirations in interviews, for example, does not always receive confirmation in the polls. We have to acknowledge unresolved trade-offs in the polyphony of voices. Yet we have also discovered multiple instances of generational unity among young Europeans' concerns. This final chapter synthesises some of the report's findings and looks into three domains of interaction—the implications of free movement, the unity of social and environmental Europe, and Europe as a community of values in a changing world—drawing out synergies and tensions in what young Europeans want.

Free movement: “a huge window”

As we have seen from multiple rounds of polling, young Europeans consider the freedom of movement as a primary benefit of EU citizenship. We learned from our December 2020 results that 74% of all European citizens believe that the EU “would not be worth having” without free movement. Chapter 1 suggested that we might consider free movement as young Europeans' corollary experience to an older generation's sense of freedom in 1989; Chapter 2 charted the arc through which freedom of movement transitioned from a means to an end in itself—indeed, a right.

We heard in one interview that free movement “has opened up a huge window”.²⁸⁶ This “huge window” not only provides personal benefits but also shapes how young Europeans understand Europe and its institutions. As another interviewee pithily put

²⁸⁶ Europe's Stories, “Interview with (name withheld)”, *europeanmoments.com*, 2020, <https://europeanmoments.com/interviewees/copywriter>.

it, free movement is “one of the biggest aims in our common European history”.²⁸⁷ Free movement is, in one sense, a legal right distributed by the European Union and the national governments. In another sense, it is a window into what young Europeans assume about the ends and means of the EU, and seek to change in its institutions. The right of free movement has brought about a decades-long, endogenous process in the evolution of European society.

The significance of free movement does not dispel all tensions—about costs and benefits, or about movement internal and external to the EU. The first set of trade-offs pertains to the goals of material redistribution, for which young Europeans show significant commitment. Chapter 3, for example, shows that young Europeans are more positive about the immigration of non-EU citizens into their home countries, and suggests the strengthening of policies such as Erasmus and DiscoverEU to address the East–West divide inside Europe. But redistributive policies have to work within tight budgetary constraints—there will always be aspects of exclusion to any programme of redistribution. Borders have historically mediated these trade-offs, and young Europeans’ relative indifference towards national borders or an external border does not solve this problem. If we are to ambitiously imagine the future of redistribution in Europe, as this report suggests in the form of Europe-wide welfare policies, we will have to grapple even more with the trade-offs that inhere with departing from traditional understandings of borders—on the national, regional and global scale.

Free movement does not simply flatten identities, individual and collective. A second set of trade-offs relates to competing solidarities in the context of free movement. While young Europeans tend to be more comfortable with multiple layers of identity and citizenship, our polling shows that there remains significant diversity in experiences of free movement—notably, between age groups and countries. The rise of fake news highlights just one tension between freedom of movement and social solidarity. While one interviewee suggests the benefits of increased mobility—“they do not need the media or someone’s stories to make their opinion, they just go and see”—young Europeans have also witnessed the surge in disinformation that can accompany physical and digital exchange.²⁸⁸ Too uniform an approach to—and celebration of—free movement may further aggravate the tensions between diverse experiences of European integration and even encourage backlashes. The key challenge here is to accommodate the diversity of perspectives while building on free movement as an indispensable and formative moment for a generation of young Europeans.

²⁸⁷ Europe’s Stories, “Interview with János Kele”, *europeanmoments.com*, 2020, <https://europeanmoments.com/interviewees/janos>.

²⁸⁸ Europe’s Stories, “Interview with Olga Tsuprykova”, *europeanmoments.com*, 2020, <https://europeanmoments.com/interviewees/olga>.

“A social and environmental Europe”

One interviewee spoke thus about the significance of climate action: “A real social and environmental Europe would be achieved then.”²⁸⁹ This invocation points us to a second domain—a Europe that is *both* social and environmental—in which young Europeans’ voices resound in synergy. We heard in another interview about the need to develop “a strategy on combatting climate change that also brings about a better life within the EU in other areas of life.”²⁹⁰ Our March 2020 poll highlights that most Europeans want the EU to be carbon-neutral by 2030, and Chapter 4 in this report further documents young Europeans’ desire for norm-setting institutions and urgent action.²⁹¹ The same poll shows that 71% of Europeans are in favour of introducing a universal basic income, and Chapter 4 details attitudes towards labour-market policies. In particular, young Europeans want to combine targeted action on climate change and job security with principles of equality and social solidarity. They are more likely to emphasise issues of gender equality, the rights of minorities and protection against discrimination.

National governments have so far dominated the creation and operation of welfare states, but our findings and analysis point to the potential in rethinking welfare on the supranational and subnational scales. We have suggested that this is a fruitful time to consider a modern European welfare state; in the case of climate action, we have also advocated for budget lines that are specific to local and regional governments. Social and environmental policies at these different levels of government, in partial autonomy from each other but also in synergy, may be crucial to making progress on job creation and the green transition.

“A real social and environmental Europe would be achieved then”

And yet there remain questions to be asked about the unity of social *and* environmental Europe. The 2020 Standard Eurobarometer found that 49% of Europeans aged 15–24 would like the largest part of the EU budget to be spent on employment and social affairs, whereas 48% would prioritise climate change. That these are the two top priorities is apparent, but how would young Europeans evaluate the trade-offs? While the urgency of climate action can be observed among young Europeans, the need for job creation and security is likely to increase dramatically in the wake of the pandemic. The goal of net zero by 2050—not to mention 2030—will have major implications for the structure of European society and economy. Targeted policies to decrease the negative environmental impact of agriculture and aviation, to

²⁸⁹ Europe’s Stories, “Interview with Sophie Wolter”, *europeanmoments.com*, 2020, <https://europeanmoments.com/interviewees/sophie>.

²⁹⁰ Europe’s Stories, “Interview with Antonia Zimmermann”, *europeanmoments.com*, 2020, <https://europeanmoments.com/interviewees/antonia>.

²⁹¹ Garton Ash and Zimmermann, 6 May 2020.

cite just two proposals, will benefit and harm different interest groups. Even in the most benign trajectory of the green transition, we must anticipate backlashes. These trade-offs will play out not only between environmental and social priorities, but also across short-, medium- and long-term strategies. So will social and environmental Europe, a linked core aspiration of young Europeans, hold together in the years to come?

A further set of difficulties resides in the institutional implications of bringing about a social-environmental Europe. Our March 2020 poll revealed the striking result that the majority of young Europeans believe that authoritarian governments are better equipped than democracies to tackle the climate crisis.²⁹² Even though young Europeans show strong support for liberal democracy at the national level, they appear to evaluate the legitimacy of European institutions in terms of performance rather than procedure. While this poll does not imply a wish for European institutions to become authoritarian, it does suggest a set of shifting and sometimes conflicting dynamics in how young Europeans relate to democratic processes. What threshold of poor performance in terms of social and environmental policy would discredit European institutions in the eyes of the young? Even if the European Green Deal is effective in moving towards net zero by 2045, how can it be deemed to succeed while also handing out enormous sums to member states that are eroding liberal democracy at home? To what extent is the existing economic and financial system compatible with our description of what young Europeans want?

A community of values in a changing world

Everyday life in Europe is permeated by external elements. These relations with the wider world shape every sphere that this report has analysed—including the future of free movement, democracy in member states and the fiscal basis of social Europe. Is there a trade-off between young Europeans' emphasis on Europe as a community of values and their indifference to foreign policy in general and the EU's superpower aspirations in particular? Chapter 7 points out that the EU has in the past been conceived of as the “anti-geopolitical actor *par excellence*”. Our polling suggests that most young Europeans would want a coherent foreign policy at the EU level. But they do not, on the whole, prioritise foreign policy or consider it necessary for the EU to position itself as a superpower. Young Europeans have a strong desire for the EU to stand for liberal, open and egalitarian values. But can such strategic autonomy be achieved without the border control, foreign policy and armed force associated with superpower status? Will we witness a progressive decline in Europe's global influence, and even its ability to stand for its values?

These questions cannot be answered in this report—our task has been to foreground and frame them, but they will require the energies of Europeans, younger and older, in the years to come. As we heard in one interview: “We are now in the struggle of preserving what we feel excited about in Europe in a world which is rapidly changing

²⁹² Garton Ash and Zimmermann, 6 May 2020.

and provides a lot of avenues for contestation.”²⁹³ By broadening the frame from the traditional areas of foreign and security policy to the context of Europe in a changing world, the next major focus of the Dahrendorf Programme’s work will dive deeper into the possibilities and synergies in Europe’s external relations. The preceding chapters have alluded to two such possibilities that would merit further discussion: first, on the basis of most Europeans’ indifference or aversion towards military power, the construction of a consensus on Europe as a civilian superpower, and second, given the primacy of social and environmental issues for young Europeans, the development of the EU as a green superpower.

A message to the EU

We have now reflected upon synergies and tensions. There is no way to capture, in a single way, what young Europeans have to say to the EU. One contribution of our polling and interviews has precisely been to present the diversity and texture within a generation—and within the complex relations among European institutions, member states and their constituencies. Such diversity bears witness to the fact that the EU is now part of a mature political system, brought about by long-term institutional formation. European institutions reflect where we are just as much as where we wish to be. Our March 2021 polling suggests that young people, compared to older Europeans, remain optimistic about European integration. But one expert interviewee puts it more cautiously: “The most important thing that the European Union should achieve in 2030 is to stay together.”²⁹⁴ At a time when its very institutional existence may not be taken for granted, the EU cannot afford to squander the goodwill of young Europeans. Building on our findings and the preceding chapters, we conclude with the following calls for the EU to consider.

“The most important thing that the European Union should achieve in 2030 is to stay together”

What should the EU do? Deliver competently and promptly on promises. In her 2021 Dahrendorf Lecture, Catherine de Vries expanded upon the benchmark theory of public opinion towards European integration, and in particular, the “EU differential” that describes the comparative advantages of EU membership.²⁹⁵ The execution of the Covid-19 vaccine rollout has exposed the incompetence of EU institutions—in a dual sense, their limited scope in a multi-layered system and their underwhelming performance. This episode has a broader lesson, which resonates with young Europeans’ understanding of legitimacy: European institutions must first prioritise

²⁹³ Garton Ash *et al.*, 25 May 2021; Europe’s Stories, “Interview with Hartmut Mayer”, *europeanmoments.com*, 2020, <https://europeanmoments.com/stories/hartmut-mayer>.

²⁹⁴ Europe’s Stories, “Interview with Ivan Krastev”, *europeanmoments.com*, 2020, <https://europeanmoments.com/stories/ivan-krastev>.

²⁹⁵ Catherine de Vries, “2021 Dahrendorf Lecture: What do Europeans citizens want the EU to be?“, *europeanmoments.com*, 29 Apr 2021, <https://youtu.be/u5Ri66IV4dA>.

performance, measured by tangible outputs. One day the vaccine roll out will be over, but the EU cannot afford to deliver any less on what young Europeans believe in—climate action, job security, a regime of border management premised on free movement and respect for human rights. The pandemic has accelerated the performance-based competition between European institutions and those of nation-states, including post-Brexit Britain. There is no substitute for competent and timely delivery.

What should the EU be? Investigate and imagine the European project in line with young Europeans' voices. In particular, this chapter has highlighted three domains of interaction on which many young Europeans converge: a society premised on free movement, a social and environmental Europe, and a community of values in a changing world. Young Europeans assume the existence of the EU; our March 2021 poll shows their general support for further integration.²⁹⁶ But many also see European institutions as starting rather than ending points, and wish to direct them towards larger global goals—whether social, environmental, political or other. The task will be to make progress on these domains of convergence while taking on board the diversity and disagreements among European publics; hence the need for a ‘pedagogy’ of synergies and trade-offs, towards which this report aims to contribute. Whether this involves further European integration in any given field is something that the EU needs to investigate *together* with young people.

How should the EU speak and listen? Develop more effective habits of communication. Our December 2020 poll highlights the danger in assuming that European citizens understand even the basic organisation of EU institutions.²⁹⁷ The debate on whether EU institutions suffer from a democratic deficit will continue—not least in relation to their capacity to send a clear message about democracy in member states. What is clear is that, if these institutions are to survive and thrive, they must do better in communicating clearly and persuasively. Just as young Europeans will have to debate the tensions in what they ask of the EU, in order to arrive at moments of synergy, European institutions will have to search for effective ways to convey the coherence and efficacy of their actions, for audiences at home and abroad. Most of all, the success of the EU will depend on improving channels of *listening*, at the supranational, national and local levels. Nor are institutional channels, abstractly conceived, sufficient for such dialogue. As we have learned about the polyphony of Europe’s Stories, we have often been surprised by the multiple views and values they contain. Similarly, the EU must cultivate new habits of listening. It should start not with an ideal destination of perfect European unity, but with a clearer understanding of where Europeans actually are with respect to EUrope, and what they would like the EU to do and be.

²⁹⁶ Garton Ash *et al.*, 25 May 2021.

²⁹⁷ Garton Ash *et al.*, 26 Jan 2021.

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Adriana Riganova studied Politics and East European Studies at UCL and subsequently worked in London for three years. She is presently studying for the MSc in Russian and East European Studies at the University of Oxford. Her research interests are predominantly about the Visegrad countries, and topics of interest include democratisation and backsliding, minority rights and ethnic integration, and corruption.



David Saveliev graduated from Johns Hopkins University with a degree in International Relations and Film Production. He is an MPhil student in Russian and East European studies and a Dahrendorf Scholar. His dissertation is on modern revolutionary movements. He occasionally works as a journalist covering protests and international affairs.



Lilly Schreiter is currently finishing an MPhil in Modern European History at Oxford University. In September 2021, she will embark on a PhD in International History and Politics at the Graduate Institute in Geneva.



Dan Snow is studying for a DPhil in Sociology at Nuffield College, Oxford. Dan uses quantitative methods to try and explain changing patterns of voting behaviour and attitudes in the British electorate over time. He also has a keen research interest in polling methodology.



Lucas Tse is a DPhil candidate in Economic and Social History at All Souls College, Oxford. His work is in international and economic history, and his thesis examines the transnational networks that connected republican China with global organisations.



Sophie Vèriter is a doctoral researcher at the Institute of Security and Global Affairs (ISGA), Leiden University. Her research focuses on European foreign policy making with a specific interest in hybrid interference, strategic communication and disinformation. She holds an MPhil in European Politics and Society from the University of Oxford.



Achille Versaevel joined the Dahrendorf Programme for the Study of Freedom in 2019, when he was reading for an MSc in Migration Studies at the University of Oxford. He previously worked for a committee of the International Organisation for Migration, Frontex and is currently a staff member for the Justice and Home Affairs Committee of the UK House of Lords.

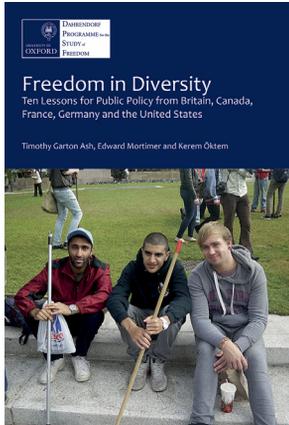


Reja Wyss is an MPhil student in Russian and East European Studies at St Antony's College, Oxford. She was a 2020 Dahrendorf Scholar. Her research focuses on the relationship between science, technology and politics, ranging from the situation of Polish academia under a populist government to European climate politics.



Antonia Zimmermann is a trainee at Politico Europe and at Axel Springer's Journalism School. She became a member of the Europe's Stories team during her time at Oxford, where she obtained an MPhil in European Politics and Society. Her work focuses on issues related to European migration, citizenship policies and climate change.

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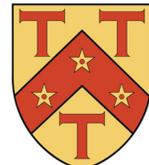
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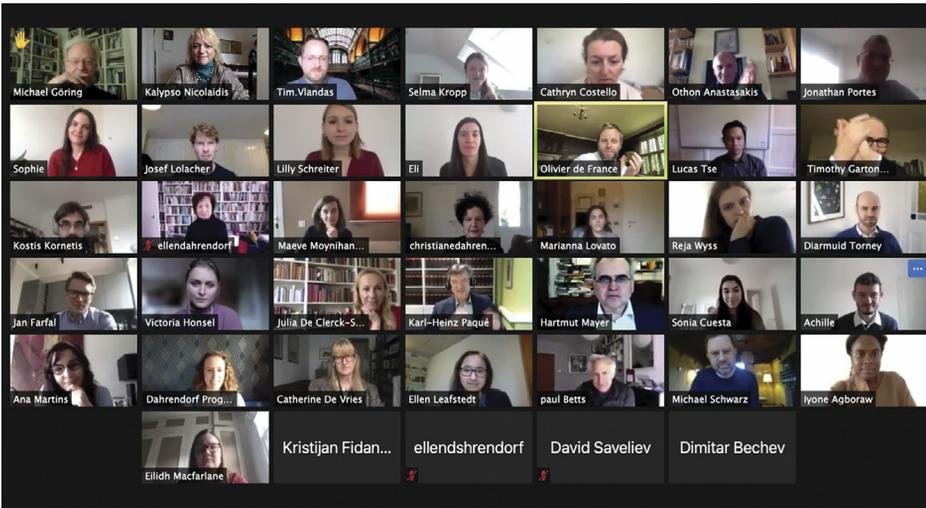


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The front cover shows "Europe leading the people in a time of Covid" (with apologies to Eugène Delacroix). A tableau vivant was created and performed by members of our Europe's Stories research team in the seminar room of the European Studies Centre at Oxford, photographed by Billy Craigan-Toon and artistically adapted by Robin Roberts-Gant.

The back cover shows our 2021 virtual Dahrendorf Colloquium, discussing a draft of this report.

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