EYE2021
YOUTH IDEAS REPORT

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of **Europe**

Climate change and environment

Make recycling easier across the EU

Borders should not interrupt our efforts to reduce waste and transition to green and circular economies. Member States currently have diverging approaches to recycling policies, which results in disruption to recycling habits *and* huge amounts of waste. This is why it is important to come up with a **standardised recycling system** that applies to the whole continent. A good approach can be seen in the system of **'reverse vending machines'**. Citizens will pay a small fee whenever they buy packaged goods that will be returned to them when they deposit the packaging back into these vending machines.

In order to make this work across the EU, it is critical that manufacturing and material use is unified. Additionally, simplifying the composition of packaging will ensure that every single scrap can be effectively recycled everywhere. This system should be implemented with a significant transition period, to allow adjustments in production, and time to educate people on new practices and expectations. Mandatory labels could also empower and inform customers about this new system and where to recycle their waste.

Green equality within business

The empowerment of eco-friendly, small businesses is a key tool to achieving a green transition. Large, less sustainable corporations remain dominant in the market, leaving almost no room for greener companies to compete. To ensure that **economic growth is ecological**, EU institutions should remove all incentives to use fossil fuels, immediately. These funds can then be repurposed to develop eco-friendly initiatives within small business ventures. For example, we can make access to credit *more flexible* for smaller companies who respect green trends and practices.

Additionally, it is important that the European Union encourages and subsidises the creation of local markets, where small business farmers can sell local produce to nearby consumers, shifting the focus from large supermarket consumption and **making local consumption more attractive** for families and customers.

Health

Holistic approach to health

We need to take a more holistic approach to health on an institutional level. **A new EU health pact** would educate people on the importance of eating a balanced diet, exercising, and employ mental health experts within schools. COVID-19 has shown us that we must educate and empower people to take better care of their mental and physical health.

New legislation should include:
- Support to train and empower mental health experts within schools
- Lessons on eating a healthy diet and the importance of exercising, for schools to employ
- Mental health safe spaces in cities and towns, where people can seek refuge in busy areas if they suffer a panic attack or other symptoms of a mental illness
- An information campaign which signposts citizens to reliable information on eating well and looking after your mental wellbeing

Hold companies accountable

Climate change is wreaking havoc on our and our planet's health, and the problem is becoming more urgent. Floods, droughts, toxic waste and air pollution within cities is damaging the health of European populations.

We need to hold companies accountable to the damage they do to our lakes, oceans, air and land for the sake of our wellbeing. Companies should be sanctioned for damage to the environment, and subsequent consequences on public health. Often. it is the public and public funds that pay for general healthcare and welfare. We need to immediately come up with a strategy to measure company waste and pollution in cities; we can look at rising chronic disease and allergy rates as markers for local pollution and damage to population health.

Additionally, employers must facilitate the use of **sustainable transport**, such as public railways and bicycles via subsidies or appropriate storage facilities. These choices not only better the planet, but better our physical health.

A stronger economy, social justice and jobs

Quality start to working life

Reducing youth unemployment should be a primary EU priority, especially in a post-pandemic economy. The Union should allocate more financial resources to initiatives which **facilitate new jobs for young people** and assist young people in entering the job market.

We need to:
- Establish specific funds to end unpaid internships, regardless of education or social status.
- Create a platform in coordination with youth organisations and employers (companies, institutions, and NGOs) to help young people to find paid internships according to their preferences across a range of industries.
- Create a network of mediators within Member State schools, to reach potential "early school leavers", and educate them on their options. This is especially important for underdeveloped countries.

Fiscal and political integration within the EU

To ensure better integration within the Union, now is the time to apply **one fiscal system across the EU**, in order to achieve Member State equality.
This fiscal integration would have many advantages:

- It would result in fairer distribution of funds between wealthy and underdeveloped Member States.
- It would lead to a larger budget and common fiscal policy legislation.
- It would minimise bureaucracy.
- We could develop investments for other proposals, such as common wage policies, a joint action against unemployment and a consistent retirement age.

Digital transformation

Education on the safe use of social media

Education on safe social media use *should* be a priority in 2021, as platforms come to dominate our personal and professional lives. Digitally literate people will not only be better equipped to deal with cyber threats, but will also use social media platforms with respect and tolerance.

No one should be left behind in the digital world; **we must educate all generations to use their digital presence with care**. For children in particular, we can:

- Integrate digital literacy into the school curriculum.
- Celebrate international digital days, during which children will be provided with practical and theoretical lessons.
- Use interactive games as learning tools.
- Create a simulated social media platform, so children can learn about the danger of cyber attacks and avoid the real life consequences.

Strengthen EU legislation on cybersecurity

In our increasingly digital world, we need a **greater level of cybersecurity** by strengthening international legislative frameworks. An EU-wide legislation is needed in order to ensure that citizen privacy and digital rights are more effectively protected.

The EU should create a committee of experts who will represent all Member States and define what a cybercrime is, and what legislation we should adopt. Such an institution needs to be shielded from potential lobbying and large corporations.

Legislation should also guarantee that online platforms verify user ID in order to fight online anonymity, which can lead to online abuse, invalid information and cyber attacks.

Values and rights, rule of law, security

The rule of law

The EU is a union of values. We want binding mechanisms to uphold the Union's values expressed in Article 2 of the Treaty, such as rule of law and respect for minority rights. The treaties should be changed so that the unanimity rule in Article 7 is replaced by a **qualified majority rule**. Moreover, the European Commission *and* the Parliament should have a vote in the process, included in the calculation for the qualified majority. Once launched, Article 7 processes must have clear timelines. The Court of Justice must remain the only competent court to adjudicate EU law, including matters concerning rule of law.

We must give full effect to **the rule of law conditionality** clause attached to the EU budget and the Next Generation EU fund. The Commission must adopt relevant guidelines now.

In addition, the EU must assess Member States' respect for the EU's fundamental values, modelled on the pre-accession reporting processes for candidate countries.

Equal rights for LGBTQI +

The EU should embrace dignity, fairness and respect as recognised and shared values. We must ensure that LGBT+ communities across the EU enjoy equal rights. The EU can *and should* define attacks against the LGBT+ community as hate crimes.

Real change begins in collective attitudes, and top down initiatives on their own, without support from the ground, can be counterproductive. The EU needs to **support bottom-up initiatives**, by promoting awareness of LGBT+ issues, and empowering regional and national activist groups. This support should take the form of an action plan, event production, new LGBT+ publications and funded group initiatives. Our communities need to be better informed about the rights that LGBT+ people are currently lacking, and struggles that LGBT+ communities face. Empathy and understanding is the first step in empowering others.

Migration

Support for young refugee scholars

The EU should fund a program which gives **access to EU universities to refugee students and scholars**. It should identify European universities interested in hosting refugee scholars, and liaise with the UNHCR to identify and contact refugee scholars. Universities could set some requirements for scholars, such as specific knowledge criteria, but should not be allowed to discriminate on grounds of origins in any way. Interested candidates should receive support from the EU, which would provide funding for NGOs that in turn supports candidates throughout the application process. Once accepted, refugee scholars should have access to preparatory training if needed.

A **central European fund** would be the best way to sponsor universities that accept refugee students, supporting primary needs such as accommodation, food, and language courses. Such a program would help the EU to respond to the challenge of an ageing population; strengthen EU values of solidarity and human dignity; allow refugees to gain skills in return for contribution to host countries, allow host countries to gain a new, skilled workforce; and, importantly, reduce mistrust of migrants and populist rhetoric.

Better support to asylum seekers

The accommodation of asylum seekers for long periods in camps in Member States is inhumane and unsustainable. Improving this situation must be a priority. **The EU should strengthen centralised funding** which incentivises Member States to accept migrants. Funding should be used to sponsor states' acceptance of migrants, and to streamline bureaucratic and integration processes. It should be used to:

- immediately recruit translators and immigration lawyers to be present in Mediterranean countries, reducing processing times for asylum requests;
- provide for migrants' initial needs in countries of immediate reception; and cover the cost of food, shelter, medicine and infant needs;
- support integration in destination states, reducing unwillingness to accept migrants;
- provide technical support and advice across the EU.

Assistance should also be given to states to set up apprenticeships for asylum seekers, and accelerate integration; enabling them to contribute to their host countries; and reducing host communities' mistrust of migrants. This may be complemented by increased recognition of migrants' previous qualifications, and by assigning processed asylum seekers to Member States according to their skills and states' needs.

Education, youth, culture & sport

Non-formal education in schools

The EU must provide more funding to enable all young Europeans to participate in non-formal education. The mechanisms already exist: Bridging Education, Study and Training (*BEST*) would easily fit into the Erasmus+ programme alongside actions such as eTwinning and staff exchanges. What we need now is the political will.

Non-formal education can have many different faces - among them voluntary services, youth exchanges and sports programmes. Young Europeans need to **learn practical skills** to grow into well-rounded, responsible, and conscientious citizens and non-formal education is a great place to allow for a more holistic education.

In addition, a European non-formal education program could create a platform bridging the gap between school teachers and service providers that can provide expertise on topics relevant to contemporary life. The platform would also feature information on innovative, interactive and engaging learning methodologies as well as networking opportunities.

Better school curricula

Let's rethink school curricula! European schools need to offer a more useful and practical education, and include **subjects relevant to life in the contemporary world**, such as mental health awareness, sex education, digital and financial literacy, environmental education and intercultural skills. Schools need to continuously reevaluate what their students need in order to facilitate a generation that is prepared for the workforce.

Furthermore, in an increasingly globalised world, both intercultural skills and knowledge about the opportunities and benefits that Europe brings become more and more important. If schools help to strengthen both, we could create a more vibrant, diverse and engaged society in which we are one Europe, working towards common goals and actively engaging with the world. We can respond to challenges on a political and personal level, effectively.

Creating these new school subjects is beneficial to young people and Europe as a whole in several ways. Exposing young Europeans to topics with modern and practical implications will help nurture a citizenry that is open-minded, inclusive and tolerant. It will build empathy and bring Europeans closer together.

EU and the world

Federal Europe

Climate change, COVID-19 and international security concerns represent significant challenges to the European Union, its Member States and citizens. To tackle them, we need to commit to a federal state.

This way, we can become a greater global force to be reckoned with – economically, politically, militarily, and culturally. A **federal Europe** is by no means an easy task, but a **long-term project with great prospects**: cutting costs to national governments will allow us the opportunity to invest in health policy and climate change.

Furthermore, a federal Europe can unify people from all backgrounds and ideologies, and strengthen European identity by bridging internal gaps, which, in turn, will then make the State of Europe a strong, resilient player. This gives us the ability to speak with a common voice and enables us to promote European values and peace in an international arena.

Stronger common foreign policy

A more effective common foreign policy could give the European Union a stronger presence in world negotiations, and eliminate the need for several bilateral agreements between Member States and third party countries. As a **strong, multilateral and non-hegemonic power**, our Union can address global challenges and react more quickly and efficiently to international security threats both in Europe and worldwide.

By adopting a common foreign policy, we can:

- Promote values, for example by effectively banning any trade of goods which supports forced labour.
- Strengthen a European identity – and build trust from citizens in this new power.
- Improve resistance vis-à-vis and react appropriately to undemocratic powers and security threats
- Assure our voices are heard in international negotiations and world politics.

European democracy

A single standardised EU passport

Let's unlock the potential of EU citizenship! As a first step, we can create a **single, standardised EU passport and ID card** for all EU citizens, which would be valid for entry and residence within all Member States.

Secondly, we must *experience* Europe in order to feel European. For that, it is important to make it easier for citizens to live in different Member States and move between them. That's why we need standardised relocation and registration processes in all EU countries: it should be as easy to move within the EU as it is to move within a Member State.

When designing such policies and processes, we must ensure everyone is treated equally. Therefore, we should make EU-wide rules for relocation *to* and registration *in* different Member States. For example, EU citizens should be allowed to vote in all elections of the country they reside in - regardless of their native country.

Transnational lists for EU elections

The EU has a problem: its citizens are still not properly represented, which among other things affects their trust in politics and their level of engagement *with* policy-makers.

But... we can change this! We should use **transnational lists for European Parliament elections**: in practice, voters would be given a list of national candidates as before, and an additional country's election list. With such a system, we can make sure that candidates still represent all regions, and at the same time allow citizens to vote for politicians from Member States other than their own.

The same should apply to the candidates for the President of the Commission. We should reinforce the so-called "**Spitzenkandidaten" system**, where each party announces the President of the Commission before the election campaign in the case that this party gains a majority. This candidate should be present throughout the campaign and participate in election activities. In that way, the President would be more closely connected to the voters.

Other

Unite in multilingualism

Let's unite for multilingualism!

More EU funding should be used to support multilingualism. As a first step, **language learning in schools needs to be reformed**: whereas many students get to study languages spoken in larger EU countries, only few get to study languages spoken by fewer EU citizens, even though those languages might be spoken in countries much closer to them. Many bilingual students are also unable to study their native language in school, and many languages spoken by national, ethnic and linguistic minorities are not offered to them, threatening their right to use their native tongue. More funding must facilitate language classes and train teachers who can promote multilingualism in the education system.

As a next step, we can **enhance youth exchanges** such as study trips aimed at learning a foreign language, as well as changing official communication. Some events and programs targeted at young Europeans are already carried out in multiple languages: more EU funding could enable *even more* events and programs to provide such language learning opportunities to young Europeans.

Prioritise transparency in EU politics

All European policies need to be evaluated in a transparent way. Some of them may not reach their goals or target communities: they might, for example, forget to take the specific situation of citizens living in rural areas or economically weaker countries into account. To learn from the mistakes we have made in the past and **create better policies in the future**, citizens must be able to understand why individual policies are created and reformed: transparent and understandable evaluations will enable them to make well-informed decisions in elections.

Secondly, the work of lobbyists in the EU must be made more transparent. Lobbyists must be regulated more strictly to make sure that politicians listen to their voters. Over the past few years, there have been some initial efforts to strengthen regulation. These are a step in the right direction: one way to further foster transparency would, for example, be to expand the scope and use of **transparency registers**. Such measures will additionally increase citizens' trust in the Union and in its policies.