European Universities Community VOICES

#ESA24
3rd Edition



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Of the European Student Assembly 2024

Co-funded by the European Union

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Think before you print.

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01 | PROJECT

EUC VOICES

EUC VOICES (European Universities Community VOICES) is an Erasmus project which aims at giving the voice to students from European universities alliances in order to promote the European citizenship. This is achieved through 3 main activities: European Student Assembly, Ambassadors Forum and EUC Alumni Network; implemented by a consortium of universities: Université Grenoble Alpes (WP1), Université de Strasbourg and Universitatea Tehnică din Cluj-Napoca (WP2), Szkoła Główna Handlowa w Warszawie and the European Student Network (WP3), Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg (WP4), Università degli Studi di Torino and NHL Stenden Hogeschool (WP5).

European Student Assembly

In 2022, the inaugural session of ESA took place in the framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe. It marked the beginning of a series of assemblies that is providing an opportunity to students from all European universities alliances to meet, debate and express their views on the EU.

For the third edition of ESA (10-12 April 2024), after a competitive application process and an intensive online preparation phase, a pool of 250 students representing 59 nationalities and coming from 170 universities belonging to 41 European universities alliances has been invited to come to the European Parliament in Strasbourg to meet in person. Organised in 11 panels, they were asked to finalise up to 8 proposals on their respective panel topic and to participate to inter-panel debates. The Assembly concluded on the voting and adoption of 79 recommendations which are presented in this report.

This ESA edition benefited from the academic and organisational support of the EUC VOICES project partners, in particular Université de Strasbourg, Universitatea Tehnică din Cluj-Napoca, and Université Grenoble Alpes, and the support from the Conference Unit of the European Parliament in Strasbourg. Support from the European universities alliances was key to spread the information, to help in selecting students and to cover travel and accommodation costs. The event would not have occurred without the support of the French-German University, French-Italian University, France Universités, and Uni-Italia.

This publication of the students' Policy Recommendations reflects their state of mind, expectations and determination to have a concrete impact on their future that could lead to political responses at local, national and European level. It serves the purpose of giving a voice to students and it aims to be disseminated at a larger scale, starting within the universities' communities.

02 | TIMELINE



The 250 students have been selected out of more than 2200 applications across Europe.
The selection process was based on motivation and academic excellence. It ensured the best representation of genders, ages, countries, levels and fields of study.
As a result, the ESA managed to unite students from Bachelor to PhD, with a common interest to debate on the future of Europe.
The participant's onboarding session was held online on 24 January.
Each of the 11 Panels has met several times between January and April 2024, with the help of two panel Coordinators and a panel supervisor. coordinators and participants have participated in three dedicated workshops in parallel to help them facilitate the work of their panel.

Experts have been invited to help students identify the stakes and issues their panel had to deal with. Online working sessions were held to let students exchange their ideas and work on their recommendations.
During the three days spent at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, students finalised their recommendations. They eventually presented 82 recommendations (3 of which were rejected) in front of the Assembly and voted them individually.
From April 2024 onward, our main aim is to disseminate these recommendations to the largest number of students, citizens, decision makers and stakeholders at local, national and European level.

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04 | PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS

PANEL 1 : EUROPEAN ELECTION YEAR. HOW TO TACKLE THE LACK OF (AND DIS-) INFORMATION AND ENCOURAGE CITIZENS' ENGAGEMENT IN THE UPCOMING ELECTIONS?

Executive summary

European elections were introduced in 1979, marking a significant step towards the democratisation of the European Union. They are among the largest direct democratic elections in the world, involving 27 countries with 450 million people. Despite the global relevance of this event, electoral mobilisation remains weak with a maximum voter turnout of 50.66% reached in the previous 2019 elections.
In order to foster greater voter turnout over time, our efforts are directed towards the implementation of recommendations spanning from short- to long-term measures. They range from encouraging youth involvement to tackling misinformation and advocating for structural reforms by amending foundational EU treaties. These strategies aim to merge individuals from diverse European nations through expanded programs, educational interventions, and important reforms. Such initiatives are essential for nurturing mutual understanding and cultivating a broad-minded European identity. Successful execution of these measures will establish an environment conducive to significant and enriched civic participation across Europe.

Problem Statement

Nothing reveals the health of a democracy better than its voting turnouts. Many voters are unaware of the functions, powers of EU institutions, including the European Parliament. This lack of awareness is as much of a burden for Europeans who don't think the EU is truly representative of its people, as it is for EU institutions which suffer from social illegitimacy and democratic deficiency. Nonetheless, the persistence of this problem begs the question: How has it been 40 years that we are trying to tackle the same issue? It makes one wonder if weak electoral participation is truly the cause of a lack of communication and knowledge of the EU among voters or if it is a structural one. Since 1979, the European elections have experienced persistent low voting turnouts while the European Parliament's power has continued to grow. But the power of whom? Is the European Parliament truly capable of fulfilling its role as a democratic representative body? It is also impossible to ignore the rise of misinformation and false information and its damaging consequences for democracy. By deteriorating the public trust in media channels, it has become harder for voters to make informed decisions. This has fueled a climate of distrust and scepticism and to a certain degree a rise in populist radicalisation. Democracy cannot survive if the channels of communication are clogged by rubbish news. It is impossible to nurture coherent reasoning with inaccurate and misleading polls and campaigns.

This danger cannot be reduced without the persistent and participation of Europeans from all member states. As a matter of fact, the participatory instruments of the EU are still wildly unknown to the average European. At the core of this problem lies a lack of efficient campaigning and outreach, as it is still a rarity to be well-informed on European elections. To enhance citizens' engagement, the EU needs to double its efforts to compel the silent majority to participate in its elections by fostering greater collaboration between EU institutions and local organisations. Addressing this challenge requires a multifaceted response that addresses the root causes of political disengagement while also mitigating the impact of misinformation and false information on democratic processes. It is essential to make the results of electoral participation visible to Europeans to maintain electoral engagement. At the core of such change is the strengthening of the electoral and representative powers of the European Parliament in addition to the solidification of informed communication between citizens and the European Parliament. This year, we have a chance to break the record of the highest turnout rate at the European elections.

Recommendations

1.1. Preventing Misinformation among Social Media Users: AI Algorithms, Track of False Information's Evolution and Educational Content on the Dangers of Misinformation. The efforts to counter misinformation on social media, particularly during elections, begin with targeted advertisements and the development of supervised AI algorithms for the detection of disinformation. We suggest that this be initiated by public/private bodies such as the European Digital Media Observatory, which is already committed to combating the spread of fake news. We also suggest initiating this activity in collaboration with organisations such as StopFake, which addresses such issues from an external perspective. We recommend that this initiative be adopted by the European Parliament in addition to the EU AI Act, to hold social media platforms accountable for spreading misleading information, which poses a significant threat to democracy in Europe. Following a mid-term action of thorough research on users' awareness of fake and misleading polls, and mal-information on politicians and parties, there will be a strengthening of the prevention of false information believers. Public opinion firms such as Eurobarometer, already involved in electoral processes, will undertake the research. Finally, the long-term approach entails promoting events on awareness of media literacy. Emphasis would be placed on civil servants and educators, given their pivotal role in society, to infuse an understanding of the dangers posed by disinformation to democracy.

1.2. EU Student Ambassadors to Educate Future European Voters. The proposed program, while acknowledging existing citizens-led similar efforts, aims at creating an initiative led and coordinated by the European Commission to cultivate a culture of civic engagement among EU youth. The program aims to increase future voters' participation in the elections by teaching young people about the inner workings of the EU, its policies, and opportunities. Implementation of the initiative includes the annual designation of student ambassadors in each Member State according to the number of NUTS 2 (territorial divisions), based on their demonstrated commitment to civic engagement and leadership qualities.

These ambassadors would undergo training on EU functioning, policies, electoral processes and communication strategies, facilitated by a dedicated Coordinating Department within the Directorate General of Education, Youth, Sport, and Culture. The ambassadors' mandate is to reach out to schools (middle schools and high schools) and youth centres to provide peer-to-peer education, as well as disseminate EU-related information on social media and advocate for democratic participation. In recognition of their contributions, ambassadors receive an official professional certification, a complimentary EU course, reimbursements, and a trip to Brussels to visit the institutions. The Program is subjected to continuous evaluation by the Coordinating Department with feedback from ambassadors and stakeholders to ensure its efficacy and improvement.

1.3. Empowering Citizens through EU Podcast Education. The development of an EU podcast represents a strategic approach to addressing the disparities in awareness and knowledge about the European Union (EU) across member states. With the exponential growth in podcast listenership over recent years, leveraging this medium for disseminating education and information is fundamental. Despite the existence of various podcasts about EU matters organised by external entities in different countries, there is currently no single, consistently published EU-provided podcast. The Directorate General of Communication should be responsible for the efficient, ongoing production of podcast episodes. Utilising the social media platforms and websites of the European Commission's Permanent Representations, content will be disseminated to engage diverse audiences. To seamlessly integrate the podcast into people's daily lives, episodes will be released weekly through the main used streaming platforms and radio channels to reach different demographics. The podcast will host different kinds of content and guests from the Commission, policymakers, experts and members of civil society. The translation into all official languages spoken within the EU, will enable a wider audience to access and engage with the content effectively. Through a contemporary education tool, the aim is to bring citizens closer to the European Union in an accessible and inclusive way.

1.4. Encouraging Voters: Social Media Campaigns by European University Alliances. The European University Alliances should become bridges between European institutions and students. Furthermore, the European Universities Alliances must become the reference initiative for higher institutions when it comes to European Affairs and Alliances demonstrating a firm conviction in the European Union's values and democratic processes. Communication via the Internet makes information more accessible to people of all ages, including those in rural areas and specifically those who have less contact with European political activity. By taking advantage of the European University Alliances' existing presence on the most popular social media platforms such as Instagram, X, and TikTok, we suggest that the Alliances develop an unbiased voting campaign in the European elections to increase and encourage participation among the university's communities. Our recommendation is to utilise short clips providing information about elections, engaging ads featuring popular influencers or young activists discussing the impact of youth participation on shaping European policies and utilising tools such as asking questions live to achieve greater interaction with the audience while avoiding sharing their private data. The Alliances could generate their own content or report the one generated by the European institutions themselves.

1.5. Introducing Transnational Electoral Lists and Harmonised Voting Slips in European Elections. This proposal advocates for the introduction of transnational electoral lists in the European Parliament, allocating remaining seats in the EP based on the proportion of votes garnered across the European Union. Allocating a substantial share of seats in the European Parliament to transnational lists in proportion to the number of votes they would receive throughout the Union would help give a voice to the EU electorate as a whole and make the European political scene one of its own, further detached from purely national concerns. The share of seats would increase automatically with each new election to reach a number of seats at least equal to half of the whole. Each voter would vote on two separate ballots, the national list and the transnational list. This approach aims to diversify the representation within the European Parliament and strengthen the EU's democratic legitimacy. By providing a platform for EU-wide participation, it fosters a distinct European political sphere, less bound by national interests. Simultaneously, the proposal suggests incorporating the names and logos of relevant European political parties on voting slips for national or subnational lists. Enhanced visibility of European parties on voting slips facilitates voter awareness. To achieve this the European Electoral Act must be amended and the member states be responsible for implementing the new provisions thereof.

1.6. Preferential Voting System in EU Elections: Ranking Candidates for Better Representation. The ranking of candidates on a selected list gives the people more control over who represents them. With preferential voting systems such as the single transferable vote, one's support for less popular candidates is not wasted; instead, it is transferred to the voter's next preference should their favourite not be elected, making every vote count towards the election outcome. Candidates are incentivised to seek broader support, both as party members and as individuals. In addition, the adoption of preferential voting might necessitate new strategies for party coalitions, potentially leading to a more cooperative and policy-focused parliamentary environment. The statute must provide for fair representation of nationals from smaller states, with less voting power. This principle of fairness is crucial for maintaining the integrity and legitimacy of the electoral system. Preferential voting can also help promote the diversity of lawmakers by ensuring that minority opinions are better represented. Updating the European Electoral Act to embrace preferential voting is crucial for realising these democratic ideals and ensuring inclusive representation within the European Union.

1.7. Strengthen the Parliament: Bicameral System with the Parliament and the Council. The European Parliament is often perceived as powerless due to its limited powers under the Treaties. However, as the only EU institution whose members are directly elected by European citizens, it should be granted greater powers and a more effective role. To achieve this, the institutional balance of the EU should shift towards a more bicameral system, with the Parliament and the Council as two equal chambers responsible for law-making and major policy decisions. The proposal recommends expanding the areas where the ordinary legislative procedure applies. It also suggests granting the Parliament the right of legislative initiative and the role of co-legislator on the long-term budget.

Furthermore, the proposal recommends reversing the roles of the Council and Parliament in the nomination and confirmation of the President of the Commission. To achieve these objectives, we propose to revise the Treaties, therefore urging the European Council to schedule a vote on the examination of the Proposals of the European Parliament for the amendment of the Treaties (which follows the CoFoE). We also call on the representatives of the Member States in the Convention that would follow in case of a positive vote by the Council (Art. 48) to adopt the stated measures.

1.8. Giving the EU the tools to protect its values and budget: reforming Article 7 of the Treaty on the European Union. This proposal aims to enhance the EU's ability to protect its fundamental values when there is a systemic risk of a breach from a member state and, by doing so, to counter democratic backsliding at the national level. This policy proposal advocates for a reform of Article 7 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU), which allows for the possibility of suspending European Union membership rights (such as voting rights in the Council of the European Union). We propose amending the TEU to replace unanimity voting in the European Council under Article 7(2) TEU with four-fifths of the Council, thus avoiding the risk that alliances between states that do not respect the EU's fundamental values block a necessary decision. Additionally, we support granting greater authority to the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) in triggering Article 7(2) and share the opinion that the CJEU possesses the necessary expertise for assessing whether the conditions for applying Article 7 have been met. We believe it is essential to provide the EU with enhanced tools to address democratic backsliding within its member states and budgetary deadlocks. The reform should be implemented before the next wave of enlargement through a Convention to revise the Treaty on the European Union.



PANEL 2 : Greener is better. How can the EU establish a responsible growth in the context ofclimate change?

Executive summary

In response to the urgent imperative posed by climate change, Panel 2 confronts the pivotal question: How can the EU achieve responsible growth while navigating the challenges of a warming planet? While the Green Deal provides a legislative framework for a green transition, recent debates highlight the need to maintain ambition and coherence. The panel proposes a social and societal impact measurement to foster a more responsible Europe. It aims to generate proposals and solutions across various sectors and levels, considering global approaches to climate issues. Summer 2023's extreme weather events serve as a backdrop for discussions on natural risk management. Key proposals include supporting young farmers in organic agriculture, fostering biodiversity compensation, promoting green railway travel and advancing EU-Global South partnerships. Additionally, the panel suggests addressing greenwashing, promoting sustainable urban farming and forestry, exploring nuclear energy as a clean alternative, and charting a green future for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). These initiatives aim to reconcile economic growth with emission reduction and waste management.

Problem Statement

With increasing droughts, floods, extinctions, and the prevalence of pollution-related illnesses, the urgency of addressing the current environmental crisis cannot be overstated. This crisis is endangering ecosystems and biodiversity and directly impacting the health and well-being of EU citizens. Furthermore, Europe's heavy reliance on external actors for essential resources such as energy and food leaves it vulnerable to geopolitical instability and manipulation. The prevalence of eco-anxiety among European youths, with 45% of individuals aged 16 to 25 experiencing it, underscores the pressing need for action and optimism. However, amidst these challenges lies an opportunity for Europe to lead by example and pioneer innovative solutions to global environmental problems. With its abundance of human, technological, and financial resources, Europe has the potential to shape the future of human-nature relationships worldwide. By prioritizing the transition away from fossil fuels and embracing local, circular economies, Europe can mitigate environmental degradation and enhance its resilience and independence. This shift towards sustainability will benefit the planet and bolster Europe's economic prosperity and geopolitical influence in the long run. Panel 2, comprised of 20 diverse and ambitious young students, embodies the determination of the next generation to secure a greener and brighter future for Europe. Their proposed policies are rooted in a collective vision for a sustainable and resilient Europe. Addressing our food systems, urban living, biodiversity, transportation, Europe's relationship with the Global South, greenwashing, green finance, and nuclear energy, the proposals of Panel 2 aim to make all aspects of European life greener while maintaining economic growth.

Therefore, it is imperative for all stakeholders, including ESA participants, EU citizens, and policymakers, to heed the voices of the youth represented by Panel 2. By embracing their bold policy proposals, Europe can chart a course towards a cleaner, greener, and better future for all its citizens.

Recommendations

2.1 Fare Play: Transforming Short-Haul Flights into Green Railway Travel. The aviation sector continues to emit substantial levels of CO2 (in 2023, 87 million tonnes of CO2 were emitted within Europe). Flights under 1500 km are responsible for 25% of European aviation's CO2 emissions. With train travel being proven as the most sustainable mode of long-distance transportation, the EU should continue its efforts to support the railway sector instead of further enhancing commercial air transport. To achieve this transition, it is recommended that the EU Government's "Mobility and Transport" Commission department increases taxes on short-haul flights where the possibility is provided to take the train, bus or other forms of greener transport in under 6 hours. Moreover, subsidies should be provided to railway operators, thereby reducing ticket prices and making rail travel more affordable. The revenue derived from the increased taxes should be allocated towards EU and national funds, improving the railway infrastructure and facilitating a significant shift away from air travel. Introducing climate tickets - covering all forms of public transportation and valid for a specific period of time - will additionally enhance cost-effectiveness and simplify travel logistics for passengers. That way, green travel alternatives will be more accessible for all European citizens.

2.2 NatureComp, the directive for nature compensation that ensures a just treatment of the environment. The EU's Birds and Habitats directives mandate biodiversity compensation for Natura 2000 site alterations, like building a railroad or street, due to overriding public interest. However, member states have discretion in implementing these compensations, leading to a patchwork of national regulations. This is threatening the EU's ecological network and potentially creating uneven competition among businesses in different countries and inconsistent compensatory measures, complicating efforts for cross-border cooperation. The primary concern, however, is biodiversity conservation, which requires uniform standards to ensure fair compensation and protect the ecological network. The European Commission, particularly the Directorate-General for Environment, thus needs to create common basic guidelines for compensatory measures as a directive that needs to be followed all over the EU, also outside of Natura 2000 sites. To do so, nature conservation and areal planning experts, local communities, NGOs and industry representatives shall be gathered to create comprehensive guidelines which include the assessment of impacts on nature and the potential compensatory measures. Flexibility for local conditions must be granted because ecological, social, and economic conditions vary across the EU and no interventions in nature are the same. Regular updates will ensure the directive's continued relevance and effectiveness in a dynamic Europe.

2.3 AgriTechEU+: Empowering farmers through cutting-edge agritech tools & training. The farming sector has a shortage of newcomers and could benefit from innovative technological tools to make the industry more efficient and sustainable. The Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development in accordance with the AGRIFISH council should draft a policy and provide funds from the current CAP to start an innovative programme for farmers. Academic training and technological tools would be provided, with special regard to organic farming. The programme can improve the attractiveness of farming as a profession, decrease inequality, and reduce resource waste. It would fulfill the three pillars of sustainability: economic, social, and environmental. The Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development will issue a first trial call for universities to apply for funds, establish application guidelines, and select participants. The goal is to have one university tailored for each climate region. Implementing within the programme a collaboration with technology tools providers would ensure complete access to quality resources. The programme would run in a trial capacity for the current CAP period, and increase universities' membership in the next CAP.

2.4 Fostering Transparency in EU-Global South Sustainability Partnerships. With the rise of greenwashing practices, addressing the transparency of the EU partnership agreements with the Global South is critical. There is also a need to expand the International Forest Partnership's bilateral agreement and Voluntary Partnership Agreements (VPAs) on Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade (FLEGT) beyond current regions, such as the Asia-Pacific region. In order to accomplish this, a comprehensive framework for cooperation must be adopted. The primary objective is to prioritize the socio-economic welfare of communities dependent on these forests in addition to conservation and restoration efforts. Ultimately, it contributes to the prosperity of local communities, guarantees the sustainable management of forest resources and enhances the irregular migration mitigation caused by climate change. We call upon the EP to implement a new resolution that emphasizes the cooperation between the EU and its partner countries. It's critical in the current situation where climate change most impacts the Global South, while the EU and its member states account for about 20% of global CO2 emissions since 1750. It's time to develop the EU's sustainable forest management practices and climate vulnerability assessments incorporated with the UN's National Adaptation Plans process (NAPs).

2.5 Greentegrity: Combatting Greenwashing with Eco-psychology Certificates. Fostering sustainability and combatting greenwashing is vital, as consumer trust and confidence in commercial sustainability have eroded. Transparency in green company certificates and sustainable practices is needed. One way to combat the issue of greenwashing is through facilitating collaborations between companies and eco-psychological practices, complementing the current EU Ecolabels targeting goods and services. These collaborations include environmental education and engagement initiatives by providing an eco-psychology certificate to foster a sense of responsibility towards nature among employees and clearer indication of truly green practices. The EU is in a unique position to facilitate dialogue and communication streams between governments and companies. We propose that the European Union act as a facilitator, to establish a programme that recognises minimum standards in internal sustainability training in the workplace.

It is submitted that each employee who completes the training be given a certificate acknowledging their achievement. A certificate should be awarded to a company who meets a minimum of 50% of employees who have completed the programme. We call upon the European Commission to put forward a resolution to establish a standard programme for workplace sustainability training.

2.6 Seeds of Change: Sustainable Urban Farming and Forests for Europe's Resilient Cities. By 2050, 70% of the global population will live in cities. The incorporation of green spaces and urban farming is imperative to address critical urban issues, such as climate change, food security, and public health, and to reconnect people with farming processes. Fragmented responsibilities and inconsistent policies across Europe have converged into a disjointed approach to improving urban livability. The "Seeds of Change" policy will create new green areas to prioritise long-term multifunctional management by forming a cohesive network with the existing infrastructures, such as the CAP, and by investing in regional-level integrative urban planning. Governments, more specifically the Urban, Agricultural, and Educational Department, and municipalities should adopt "Seeds of Change". Action should target primarily major cities, facing severe green space shortages. The initial step requires the mapping of unused urban areas and the determination of suitable green uses such as urban parks, forests, urban farming, and street trees. With government allowances and tax breaks, investment in technology and education, the responsible bodies can promote and implement "Seeds of Change". Our policy recommendation goes along with the SDG 11 for the year 2030, so we strongly advise implementing this policy before 2030.

2.7. Unleashing Nuclear Power's Potential in EU Policy. As we strive for a more sustainable energy future, it is important to consider a diverse range of energy sources. In 2023, the EP voted to incorporate nuclear energy into the Net-Zero Industry Act. Its main objective consists of attaining an important reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in the EU by 2030, mainly caused by the burning of fossil fuels. Despite the minimal carbon emissions associated with nuclear energy, it contends with adverse perceptions in many European countries. The decision by several Member States to shut down their nuclear facilities underscores the urgent imperative to address these perceptions and highlight the multiple benefits nuclear energy offers in mitigating climate change. Guaranteeing the safety of the operation as well as the handling of nuclear waste from power plants should be the EU's highest priority. For instance, France has been able to recycle 95% of their nuclear waste. By doing so, nuclear energy can provide a stable and reliable source of power that can be generated continuously, emerging as a primary substitute for fossil fuel energy sources. Besides investing in renewable energies, the reallocation of funds from fossil fuels should also include funding for the maintenance of nuclear energy in the EU.

2.8 Enabling a Green Future: Sustainable Growth for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Many companies struggle to align with the EU's sustainability goals. To address this challenge, a shift towards long-term strategic planning is essential. However, prevailing market dynamics often prioritize short-term investment for immediate growth, hindering sustainable transitions. This short-term focus not only limits SMEs ability to evolve their business models but also stems from competitive market pressures and investor preferences. While current green initiatives primarily target secondary business expenses, there's a notable gap in addressing the core business models of these companies. This financial tool supports SMEs to reach the current set rules by the EU, thus not grounding SMEs. Crucially, these initiatives tend to favour large corporations or startups over SMEs, despite they account for 90% of market share and revenue, thus bearing significant environmental impact. Policy action needs to originate from the EU's highest executive body, supported by EU-coordinated initiatives focusing on long-term investments such as the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) and the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF). Redirecting investments towards SMEs to facilitate their financial transition towards sustainable business models is paramount. Leveraging EU co-funded initiatives, these companies should be incentivized based on their commitment to fostering a sustainable future.



PANEL 3 : Cohesion through budget policies. How can the EU budget policy take part in strengthening cohesion amongst its Member States?

Executive summary

The European Union is working to become more united and strategically adept in managing budget policy in the face of important challenges. Key issues include economic, environmental concerns, and the need for better collaboration among member states. Tools such as the Multiannual Financial Framework and the European Semester have been used to align national and EU policies and for a more unified future.

Problem Statement

The European Union faces several challenges that demand strategic solutions to ensure a cohesive, prosperous, and united future. Firstly, there is a critical need to use digital transformation to promote social inclusion and cohesion, ensuring that technological advancements benefit all citizens equally. Additionally, the environmental impact of aviation and the potential of EU rail connectivity require reevaluation, with proposals to tax aviation to fund improvements in rail infrastructure being taken into account.

The Europeanization of vocational schools presents an opportunity to standardise education across Member States, thereby enhancing mobility and job opportunities among the youth across the continent. However, existing disparities in educational opportunities between vocational education and research universities have been promoting disparities among students.

There is a need to maximise the tracking of EU funding distribution on the final stage of delivery. Ensuring that finances are used according to cohesion goals is imperative for a correct implementation of the budget policies.

In the defense sector, reducing inefficiencies in spending is important to ensure that EU defense capabilities are robust yet cost-effective. Lastly, environmental policies, particularly those related to agriculture, require urgent attention to make them more sustainable with the help of potential subsidies recollected through improving agriculture outcomes.

Recommendations

3.1. Digital Transformation for Social Inclusion and Cohesion. The policy focuses on narrowing the digital divide in post-COVID recovery. Its main objective is to provide fair access to digital opportunities and enhance social cohesion by integrating underserved areas into the digital economy. This policy entails:

- Allocating specific funds from the MFF to drive digital transformation initiatives.
- Prioritizing projects that directly address and diminish the digital divide, with a focus on those with significant potential for social impact.
- Utilizing the European Semester framework to evaluate the effectiveness of projects and ensure alignment with EU-wide objectives for digital inclusivity and cohesion.
- Encouraging collaboration among diverse stakeholders, including government entities, NGOs, and the private sector, to implement and scale effective digital inclusion initiatives.

Implementation of this policy will occur during the current and upcoming EU Annual Budget Cycles. Additionally, collaboration with the private sector, such as technology companies and service providers, is essential for the expansion of digital infrastructure and services, ensuring broader access to digital resources for all.

3.2. Better CAP (Common Agricultural Policy) for a better tomorrow. The policy aims to address agricultural sustainability in the European Union (EU). The European Commission, in collaboration with member states, will implement strategic initiatives focusing on optimising agricultural practices and redistributing EU funds based on environmental impact rating . This entails allocating subsidies based on the environmental impact rating of agricultural practices, ensuring proportional direct payments to farmers. Implementation involves improving existing frameworks like the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the European Green Deal, by withdrawing completely the idea of compulsory waste lands for farmers and current procedures of spreading natural fertiliser which stand against good agricultural practices. This will be achieved by investing in innovative agricultural practices (bio-pesticides for instance) and technologies adopting an approach to proportional rating funding redistribution. The policy draft focuses on the EU, aiming to address regional disparities in agricultural sustainability, including depopulated areas in Southern Europe. It requires collaboration among stakeholders, transparent processes, and short to medium-term goals for monitoring progress.

3.3. Taxing aviation to boost EU rail connectivity. This policy proposal advocates for aviation taxation to address the high costs and inefficiencies of international train travel within the EU. By levying VAT on intra-EU flight tickets and taxing short-distance flights, the generated revenue can be invested in the development of internationally connecting railways.
This strategy aims to encourage travellers to opt for trains over planes, reducing carbon emissions and promoting sustainable transportation. The proposal includes a tax on short-distance flights to discourage air travel where rail alternatives exist, and a fund will be established to direct the tax revenue into rail infrastructure projects. These projects will focus on enhancing international connectivity and developing high-speed rail links. The proposal also considers exemptions for countries without viable greener transportation alternatives, protecting disconnected or rural regions from additional taxation. This measure upholds the principle of cohesion, ensuring fair treatment and connectivity for all.

3.4. Europeanization of vocational schools. This proposal aims to enhance social inclusion by Europeanizing vocational schools, ensuring parity with universities in educational opportunities. Currently, vocational education is undervalued compared to traditional academia, leading to exclusion from EU educational initiatives. Implementation would be the responsibility of the European Commission, Parliament, and Member States. It is crucial to establish a shared definition and acknowledgment of tertiary vocational education programs, similar to those for universities or applied science programs. Integration into EU-wide initiatives like the European Student Card and European Universities Initiative is crucial for cross-border learning and collaboration. Incentivizing English proficiency and mobility skills among vocational students fosters wider collaboration. Harmonising definitions and intra-EU recognition of vocational education programs on a Europe-wide scale promotes educational and social cohesion. It acknowledges vocational education's importance in the EU's economy, enhances skill development, and fosters a European identity among youth. The Netherlands' experience serves as a model for supporting vocational students' mobility. By bridging the gap between vocational and academic education, the proposal promotes inclusivity, cohesion, and the overall development of Europe's youth.

3.5. Enhancing Accountability and Transparency in Fund Use. With the substantial increase in expenditures of EU funds, corruption and mismanagement represent a serious challenge with regards to the development of an efficient and cohesive European budget policy. They reduce the effectiveness of policies and increase scepticism of the EU. In consequence, we suggest a number of measures to improve the management and oversight of EU funds.

We propose 3 measures to enhance the handling of EU funds:

1. Amending EU regulations to allow for the retraction of funds (effectively reducing future payments) in cases of proven negligence or corruption.
2. Establishing stricter monitoring and control mechanisms to oversee the use of EU funds. Periodic audits and reviews should be intensified and corresponding EU institutions should receive the necessary funding.
3. Creating an independant whistleblower program on the European level that offers rewards and legal protection for credible information on fund misuse.

We support the Commission's efforts, complemented by the work of other authorities - chiefly ECA, EPPO-, to hold member states accountable for any fund misuses and encourage the Commission to use the current rules and regulations to their full extent.

3.6. Maximising the efficiency of the EU fundings distribution. To address challenges in EU fund absorption, we propose increasing technical assistance funding within EU programs, especially for Member States with limited administrative capacity. By prioritizing training and support for civil servants, we can improve fund utilization. This initiative, led by the European Commission and management authorities, directly contributes to economic, social, and territorial cohesion by ensuring balanced development and reducing regional disparities. Overall, this strategic investment enhances the efficiency of EU fund distribution, promoting inclusive growth and solidarity across the Union.

3.7. Reducing inefficiencies in EU defence spending. Efficiency in EU defence spending is critical for the Union's consolidated military capabilities by 2030. However, current reluctance among member states to pool resources leads to significant inefficiencies. To address this, we propose experimenting with a collective procurement policy, for example ammunition or small equipment purchases. This way, we can create economies-of-scale and improve the cost-effectiveness of defence procurements within the EU. The European Commission should incentivize member states to participate in small-scale defence procurement projects, standardising equipment across the Union. Additionally, empowering the Commission to regulate the defence industry under Article 346 TFEU will enhance its coherence and competitiveness, while also increasing cohesion between Member States. By addressing existing gaps in defensive capabilities we ensure the ability of the armed forces of EU member states to safeguard the Union



PANEL 4 : Seeking a better future in the EU. What strategy should the EU adopt to guarantee a treatment with dignity of migrants from outside of the Union?

Executive summary

The treatment of migrants and asylum seekers within the European Union represents a critical juncture where human rights intersect with security imperatives. As Europe confronts a surge in migration in recent years which poses significant challenges, the need for effective, humane, and sustainable policies has never been more pressing. In light of rising anti-immigration sentiments and political polarisation, Europe stands at a crossroads where its response to migration will not only shape its internal dynamics but also define its leadership on the world stage. This policy brief seeks to provide a short analysis of the current state of migration both within and at the European Union borders, highlighting key challenges, stakeholders, and potential resolutions. Drawing upon evidence and best practices, this brief offers a roadmap for policymakers not only to navigate the complex terrain of migration, emphasising the importance of upholding human rights, but also to promote immigrants' integration, safeguard Europe's borders, and improve internal cooperation among member states.

Problem Statement

Between 2014 and 2023, the Mediterranean migration routes witnessed a tragic toll, with 28,854 individuals perishing or reported disappeared—an alarming figure that accounts for nearly half of global deaths or disappearances reported within this period. Regrettably, the influx of migrants into Europe has been met with a surge in discrimination, which notably augmented since the 2015 migration crisis. Xenophobic sentiments have manifested in targeted attacks, particularly against Muslims, after incidents such as the Bataclan and Nice attacks in France (2015), the attacks on crowds in Berlin in Germany (2016) and in Barcelona in Spain (2017) and 122 attacks in Europe from 2015 - 2020. The integration of migrants has also become a focal point in the political discourse, providing a pretext for the escalated rhetoric of far-right wing parties, who actively promote discriminatory and anti-migration laws. This has been further fueled by tragic events like the bombings at the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo and more recent threats targeting teachers in French schools and the high number of arson attacks on residences for refugees in Germany since 2015. At the same time, irregular migration within the EU surged by 18% in 2023 compared to the previous year; and human trafficking reached unprecedented levels in 2022, recording a staggering 10,093 cases—a 41% surge compared to 2021. The European Union finds itself confronted with an intricate web of challenges in effectively managing migration, caused by deficiencies in administrative capacity, coordination mechanisms, and allegations on the adherence to human rights standards by border control organisms. The current approach to handling irregular migrants results in overcrowded border facilities, exacerbating inhumane conditions and causing profound mental distress among individuals seeking refuge.

Data from 2022 underscores the systemic inefficiencies plaguing the asylum application process, with prolonged processing times averaging 7.6 months in Germany alone, indicative of the pressing need for streamlined procedures. Furthermore, the absence of centralised systems for processing asylum seekers results in prolonged waiting periods and substantial challenges for migrants confined to cross-border camps. Compounding these issues are the persistent delays in family reunification procedures, coupled with restricted access to legal channels and prohibitive financial barriers, amplifying the difficulty of vulnerable populations seeking sanctuary in the EU and impeding the integration of those who are already residing within its territories. Moreover, the integration of migrants is hindered by fragmented regulations and limited employment opportunities across member states, posing a significant obstacle to their successful integration into European societies. Concurrently, those who do find a job albeit temporary: e.g. seasonal workers encounter a variety of protections and treatments, necessitating the establishment of standardized regulations to ensure uniformity and fairness in their treatment. The fragile nature of public support for migrant integration underscores the urgent need for sustained engagement efforts and effective communication strategies to foster societal cohesion and acceptance. Additionally, persistent human rights violations in border protection agreements with third countries highlight the necessity for robust safeguards and rigorous monitoring mechanisms to uphold EU values and international standards. The continued erosion of human rights within migration policies not only undermines the EU's moral authority but also worsens social tensions and threatens internal stability. In light of these challenges, urgent and comprehensive reforms are imperative to safeguard the rights and well-being of migrants, while simultaneously promoting social cohesion and stability across the European Union.

Recommendations

4.1. Human Rights Compliance in Future Migration Agreements with Third Countries.
The significant number of migrants' lives lost at European borders has raised questions about the European Union's commitment to safeguarding the rights and dignity of migrants and asylum seekers. To enhance human rights protection in migration agreements, it is important to implement several recommendations. Firstly, incorporating safeguard clauses in future migration agreements is important to make parties accountable and responsible. To achieve this, stakeholders and legal experts could be consulted to address any concerns from all the parties. Establishing a monitoring and reporting system through collaboration with independent international and local human rights organisations will be crucial in enhancing transparency and reliability. This is possible as they can conduct investigations and report human rights violations without bias and hold the governments accountable for their actions. Allocation of additional resources to civil society organisations will further support their actions in monitoring and reporting human rights violations. Additionally, strengthening legal and judicial channels, including free or low-cost legal aid services, accessible proceedings and documents, and outreach programs for migrants, will facilitate swift and impartial adjudication of cases, ensuring individuals have access to redress and support across borders.

4.2. Safeguarding European Union's borders in compliance with Human Rights. To effectively safeguard all individuals living within the EU and uphold EU's leadership in the protection of Human Rights, we must address challenges such as human trafficking, smuggling, and identification of deceased migrants by improving existing institutions. To achieve that, the European Union should prioritise strengthening EUROSUR through increased investment and improved inter-institutional coordination, coupled with the extension of technology that is already used, such as a private secure blockchain database system for migrant identification. Additionally, investment in border safety resources and technologies, along with continuous human rights training for FRONTEX officers, is crucial. Furthermore, the EU should improve comprehensive identification systems across member states, integrating advanced forensic technologies, and standardised protocols, along with public awareness campaigns to facilitate the identification process and provide closure to affected families.

4.3. Creating an EU agency responsible for processing all migrants coming to the EU. In order to improve the currently inhumane treatment of migrants in overcrowded facilities at the border, European Union migration procedures should be completed in a reasonable timeframe. The current distribution of responsibilities, as designated by the Dublin Protocol, puts too much bureaucratic pressure on border countries resulting in insufficient administrative capacity. To resolve this problem the EU should establish an administrative body that is capable of handling all responsibilities and tasks of processing migrants and determining their status. This includes: providing adequate accommodation during the process (see 4.6), establishing centres equipped to obtain all necessary information (fingerprinting, interviews, etc.) within border countries receiving migrants, and preventing future backlogs by having sufficient resources to deal with migration shocks without compromising the integrity of the migrant or process (robustness). After the status of an asylum seeker has been determined (as refugee or non-refugee) the migrant is either transferred to the care of an EU member state or deported respectively. This approach is essential to ensure human rights for migrants across the entirety of the EU, preserve the solidarity of the EU, and can only be achieved with institutional expertise of the EU.

4.4. Guaranteeing migrants a minimum standard of adequate access to national services. Currently not all EU member states have adequate systems in place to connect migrants to national services in a timely fashion. Exclusion from these systems hinders the integration of migrants and exasperates divisions undermining social cohesion within member states. To remedy this inconsistency across the Union, and to ensure that all migrants have access to the services necessary to integrate into European society, a conditional funding scheme is proposed. The EU should set a benchmark for living conditions, social cohesion, housing, and other vital national services that member states provide. States that fail to live up to these standards cannot access EU funding schemes supporting migrant integration, incentivizing adherence to a minimum level of service in the EU regardless of the state providing these services. Additionally, if these incentives are deemed ineffective, there is the opportunity to expand the scheme to include sanctions for countries that fail to live up to EU standards for migrant integration on a national level.

4.5. Ensure the right to adequate accommodation for asylum seekers. The recent mass influx towards the EU has highlighted the insufficient capacity of many Member States to provide notably long term accommodation solutions. It is crucial that the EU Member States also provide adequate housing, tailored to asylum seekers' specific needs, in order to promote their future integration and mitigate the risk of homelessness and social exclusion. This entails placing asylum seekers in integrated locations offering convenient access to social and healthcare services. Priority should be awarded to facilitating independent housing arrangements and fostering collaborative social housing initiatives, especially for vulnerable groups. To do so, the duration of the stay in reception centres should not exceed 6 months, unless there is an emergency situation or independent housing is absolutely unavailable. This would facilitate the voluntary transition to independent and social housing. Furthermore, it is recommended that National Human Rights Institutions be involved in the monitoring mechanism under the Screening Regulation of the New Pact on Asylum and Migration. These independent bodies are mandated to safeguard fundamental rights, such as the right to adequate housing, outlined in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

4.6. Encourage EU-wide Job-Seeking Permit fostering transnational mobility of migrants. The European Migration Network (EMN) should lead this initiative collaborating with National Contact Points to develop a framework for the introduction of an EU-wide Job-Seeking Permit. This Permit should enable high-skilled immigrants, including: undergraduates, graduates, PhD students, researchers with an European academic background to seek employment opportunities in any Member States without boundary limitations of their first residing country. Finding jobs and internships is one of the basic instruments to support the successful integration of high-skilled migrants. Field-based language courses can further support immigrants' job-seeking and integration process. This transnational mobility enhances their possibilities of finding a job best suited to their skill sets and preferences. This policy addresses the high unemployment rates among educated migrants, hence promoting their assimilation and countering societal stigmatisation, as well as safeguarding their rights against exploitation. Consequently, this access to a more diverse talent pool fulfils Member States' business and society needs to a greater extent.

4.7. Encouraging family reunification through financial support from Member states. Along with upholding the rights to work and housing, it is imperative to respect the right of family according to article 9 in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. In order to practice this right, family reunification is a pillar to this element. Family reunification costs from 3.500 in Belgium to 8.000 in Austria. Furthermore the process of reunification takes up to 90 days consequently, applicants often fails to meet the economical requirements in this timeline because of the lack of stable resources at the same time. The suggestion is that If an applicant, otherwise called a sponsor, does not fulfil the conditions relevant to the stable and regular income for family reunification according to Directive 2003/86/EC, Article 7(1)(c), could be offered a loan by the member state with guarantee of repayment. If the member states can not f inance the loan, the EU could support them. So that a large number of sponsors use the financial support of the loan for family reunification, we recommend that the necessary information be provided openly, transparently and in different languages by the member states and the EU.

4.8. Create an EU Grant Programme to maintain public willingness to support migrants. The European Parliament should create a grant allocation programme for civil society organisations who wish to maintain the public's engagement in migration crises. This would ensure that such crises are not moved down the public's priority list. This procedure should follow the structure set out by EP-COMM-SUBV-NAT-E-2023, the Parliament's grant programme focused on engagement in the European Parliament elections. Applications should be assessed within a reasonable time in order to provide an efficient response to an urgent situation. The programme itself should last approximately nine months whereby events and campaigns are consistently active.
Applicants should submit detailed plans on how they are going to increase engagement amongst the public (e.g. by naming the target crisis and target audience, stating their objectives and their means of obtaining these objectives). Successful applicants will receive a proportionate budget and will be required to update their local European Parliament Liaison Office on their progress every 3 months. Any capital not spent should be reimbursed.



PANEL 5 : EU in the world. How can the EU be a more responsible actor in globalisation through its leadership?

Executive summary

Our priorities have been the analysis of EU investments in third countries, with a keen focus on sustainability, human rights, and adherence to the principles of green and technological transitions. We have been discussing the imperative of building relationships with different countries like equals, and the investment in the civil society and young people in a world that is changing the dynamics of cooperation and competition and is suffering a huge polarization of the international arena. On the other hand, our panel engaged in discussions on global peace and the rejection of terrorism, our attention has gravitated towards the ongoing conflict in Gaza and the allegations of violation of human rights and international law. And, specifically, how the EU's approach not only exacerbates a credibility crisis (when is seen from outside) but also tests the very values upon which our Union is founded. We have been discussing how the divergent opinions among our member states do not detract from our shared commitment to the EU's foundational values, as dictated in the Lisbon Treaty. Human rights, an uncompromising pillar of our Union, guided our discussions and proposals.

Problem Statement

We are currently facing a migration crisis, proliferation of international conflicts, the acceleration of mayor global transitions, and a year of significant political activity with elections across many countries, including within the European Union itself. The challenges before us are manifold: First, Balancing Economic Growth and Sustainability: The EU is in pursuit of economic growth, forging trade agreements, and establishing partnerships worldwide promoting a diversification of allies. Yet, the imperative question remains - how do we ensure these endeavors do not compromise our environmental standards or contribute to global inequities? Second, Upholding Human Rights and Social Values: Engaging with a diverse array of global partners presents the EU with the complex task of navigating political landscapes where human rights and social values are often sidelined. The risk? Becoming complicit in unethical practices. Last (but not least), Fostering Global Stability and Peace: The EU's diplomatic engagement is crucial in addressing global conflicts, the migration crisis, and geopolitical shifts. Our approach must be nuanced, balancing diplomatic engagement with the imperative of humanitarian action.

Recommendations

5.1. Recommendation: Strengthening Sustainable Development Accountability in EU Trade Agreements: Establishing a Spillover Monitoring Framework. In a globalised world, the actions of countries towards sustainable development, particularly those in positions of power, can significantly influence the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) worldwide. In particular, we still see significant challenges in achieving some SDGs including SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). The European Union (EU), being a major global actor and net importer of various commodities, bears a responsibility to address negative spillover effects, meaning the effects of trade that have spread further than was originally intended, imposed on other countries through its trade activities. The EU must quantify, measure, predict, and report spillover effects to better lead the process in achieving the SDGs by 2030. As such, we suggest the establishment of a comprehensive monitoring framework to quantify and mitigate negative environmental, economic, and social spillovers from EU trade agreements. This initiative would involve collaboration among relevant EU departments, such as the European Commission's Directorate-General for Trade (DG TRADE), Directorate-General for Environment (DG ENV), and Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO). By enhancing transparency, accountability, and awareness of these impacts, the EU can proactively address challenges, foster sustainable development both within and beyond its borders, enhance its diplomatic influence, and stimulate stronger partnerships with other nations committed to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

5.2. Recommendation: Enhancing EU's Response to the Refugee Crises in host countries. The European Parliament, in collaboration with European Commission's Directorate General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (NEAR), DG for International Partnerships (INTPA), DG Health Emergency Preparedness and Response (HERA), and along with the European External Action Service, should address the dire situation of refugees in host countries, such as Turkiye, Lebanon, Egypt, and others. For example, Lebanon amid a 13-year Syrian refugee crisis, grapples with a severe economic downturn, worsened by ongoing military conflicts. Over 1.5 million refugees strain its economy, public services, and social fabric, costing $40 billion since 2011. The country's plight is compounded by the loss of control over the movement of refugees, who increasingly seek refuge in European shores via perilous boat journeys. With soaring unemployment and crumbling infrastructure, stability for both refugees and citizens is crucial. To alleviate refugee suffering and prevent further displacement towards Europe, the EU should prioritize collaboration with host countries. Establishing joint committees dedicated to coordination and assistance can facilitate refugees' choices in where they live. By supporting host countries and addressing refugees' dire situations, the EU can alleviate humanitarian and socio-economic challenges, fostering global stability. Adapting EU's foreign policy to engage effectively with host countries, recognizing and addressing their interests and concerns, is beneficial for the EU to have a regional and global influence.

5.3. Recommendation: Promoting Quantifiable Sustainable International Trade through Small and Medium (SMEs) sized Partnerships. The economy should be a driver of sustainability as evidenced by 2023 IPCC reports regarding rising global temperature. To promote sustainable trading practices and economic development, the EU should expand their agreements with small and medium sized enterprises (SME) in lower developed countries (LDC)*, which increase trade partnerships with SMEs, whilst adding a quantifiable conditionality of sustainable practices. This would be by prioritising SMEs from LDCs who prove their sustainable business practices with quantifiable data. This initiative aims to provide easier access to global markets for LDCs, boost entrepreneurship, and support sustainable economic growth while addressing the import needs of the EU of goods. This can achieve this by implementing capacity-building, technological sharing, and financial support for the development of sustainable practices, and the The EU should prioritise trading with these
SMEs. This prioritisation would require the quantifiable metrics (such as metric tonnes of waste disposed sustainably). By prioritising trade agreements with countries aligned with EU values on sustainability and promoting capacity-building, the EU can make true impacts on sustainable
economic development. Lastly, this is one step towards a sustainable trade supply chain, which requires comprehensive solutions involving every nation involved, regardless of their economic state or sustainability standing. *such as the "Trade Facilitation Agreement of the WTO" **basing off of the current practice of "Sustainable development in EU trade agreements"

5.4. Recommendation: Change in EU's Strategic Approach to Israel-Palestine Conflict: Prioritizing Stability, Diplomacy and EU values. To strengthen its influence in the Middle East peace process, the European Union External Action Service, alongside member states, must establish a dedicated committee focused on the current Israel-Hamas conflict, emphasizing peace-building and hostage negotiation to foster regional stability. Immediate action is vital to address the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza, ensuring the protection of civilian life in Israel and preventing further ethnic cleansing of Palestinians. Drawing from past mediation successes, the committee must ensure inclusivity and expertise. Furthermore, the EU should urge member states to adopt a unified stance based on shared values, fostering dialogue to cultivate a common approach to conflict resolution. The EU must commit to support the UN Security Council resolution 2728 (2024) calling for a ceasefire, supporting UN bodies and agencies. Embracing a non-exclusive approach supporting Palestinian self-determination and Israeli security, the EU must uphold international law and humanitarian standards, promoting a rule-based regional order.

5.5. Strengthening the Space Policy of the European Union by promoting research and international cooperation. For the EU to become a competitive actor on the geospatial technological scene and enhance ties, we support the strengthening of the cooperation between the European Space Agency, EU, and non-EU countries. Firstly, we propose investing more in EU actors involved in space technology to ensure European competitiveness on the space market. To become a leader in space-related areas the EU should vocally advocate for impactful initiatives like the ESA Agenda 2025 and the Copernicus Cooperation Arrangements as a sign of European engagement. Secondly, the EU should ensure the implementation and promotion of the Zero Debris Charter (2023), with extra-EU adoption.

The European Commission, along with relevant EU departments such as the EEA, should foster technological cooperation with extra-EU nations, to tackle a global issue such as on the issue of space debris. Thirdly, we should prioritize exchange and technological expertise development programs. This includes the European Commission creating a designated fund for youth researchers in space-related areas. To further contribute internationally, we welcome EU satellite data sharing under Copernicus, and recommend developing technical assistance programs by including specific provisions for exchange and technological expertise development in Cooperation Arrangements.

5.6. An integrated approach to enhance conflict prevention and peace-building. The Council of the European Union and the European Council should reaffirm the Union's political commitments to Conflict Resolution and Peace Building. The European Union has the potential to deliver effective peace-making, aligning with its historical nature and the values outlined in the Treaties, particularly Article 3 paragraph 5 and Article 21 of the Treaty on European Union. However, disjunction has hindered the EU in addressing global violence, challenges to multilateralism, and violations of human rights. To shift this dynamic, a renewed, visible, and strategic commitment to global peace is necessary. Building on past successful mediation efforts this strategy should involve strengthened partnerships with multilateral institutions like the United Nations. Addressing internal inconsistencies and fragmentation within the EU is imperative, requiring the establishment of a dynamic center within the European External Action Service (EEAS) to coordinate information, formulate unified responses, and provide guidance during conflicts. Furthermore, the EU should prioritize peace-building by enhancing staff capabilities, recruiting experts, and establishing specialized bodies within the EEAS to address global conflicts with a multifaceted approach. A unified EU stance would not only bolster its international reputation but also enhance its influence and effectiveness in times of crises, enabling proactive interventions and support for those in need.

5.7. Recommendation: Encouraging conscious tourism internationally to strengthen cultural ties. The European Commission, along with other relevant EU departments, should foster tourism outside the EU to contribute to peace, sustainable development, as well as promote solidarity and mutual respect among peoples (Article 3 § 5 TEU). Taking action benefits EU vendors and promotes cultural ties. The EU should continue collaboration with the Council of Europe regarding European Cultural Routes and we welcome the regular calls for proposals of new routes supported by the Commission. Additionally, we appreciate the EU's partnership and funding of UNESCO and support of the UN Tourism. First, the Commission should expand the EU Tourism Dashboard to make it traveller-friendly by including countries outside of the EU and highlight UNESCO world heritage sites, as well as promote vendors compliant with the EU Ecolabel. Second, the EU should establish an annual 'Destination: International', allowing extra-EU countries to be spotlighted as a travel destination, particularly with nations that have historic ties to present day members of the EU. Third, the EU Parliament Tourism Task Force should ensure action on these items and the Council of the EU of the Tourism Ministers should also host a dialogue with extra-EU Tourism Ministers, or appropriate state delegates.

5.8. Recommendation: Promoting positive changes in the EU-Egypt relationship with a focus on human rights and democratic practices. The EU should prioritise promoting positive changes in the recently signed EU-Egypt deal by focusing on human rights and democratic practices. A comprehensive approach should be taken in negotiating a bilateral agreement with Egypt, encompassing sustainability, energy security, development and migration. The EU-Egypt Partnership should include explicit human rights conditionality and benchmarks to assess the implementation and progress of the partnership, as well as adherence to the rule of law, and democratic governance in Egypt. This is essential for promoting responsible and sustainable governance in Egypt, leading to genuine stability and breaking the cycle of recurring crises in the country. Mechanisms should be established to monitor the implementation and progress of the partnership, particularly in terms of human rights. Regular assessments should be conducted to ensure tangible progress is being made. The EU should encourage greater involvement of civil society organisations dealing with human rights in Egypt to be part of the Fundamental Rights platform as a way to enhance cooperation and information exchange on fundamental rights between the EU and Egypt, allowing civil society organisations to have a more effective dialogue through mechanisms of pooling of knowledge with the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA).



PANEL 6 : EU Artificial Intelligence Act. What strategies could be implemented to maximise the benefits of AI while addressing its challenges?

Executive summary

Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems and their development must be regulated in order to protect us and our autonomy. As a society we must learn how to properly work with them in order to create a sustainable, beneficial, and holistic way of utilizing AI. Implementation of these actions presents challenges due to rapid advancement, widespread use, and the need to support, not restrain, ethical development of AI. These proposed solutions aim to close some of the regulatory gaps found in the European Union Artificial Intelligence Act (EU AI Act), while acknowledging that further policy and regulation will undoubtedly be necessary overtime.

Problem Statement

Artificial Intelligence (AI) represents the next phase of the technological revolution. Use of AI by individuals and in all sectors is already widespread and expanding quickly. Despite this, general education around AI remains low, with many people thinking of AI only within the context of generative AI and advancing chatbox technology, such as ChatGPT. Concerningly, some people are unaware how and when they are engaging with AI in their daily lives through the AI generated content they consume, the technological systems they utilize, and the data they provide. For example, authors have been surprised to find that their entire books have been input as data to train AI systems without their consent or knowledge and prospective employees may not know their resumé is first being screened by AI, not a hiring manager. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development defines AI as "machine-based systems that can, for a given set of human-defined objectives, make predictions, recommendations, or decisions influencing real or virtual environments" These systems are "trained" by humans, they do not inherently have the ability to act in a human way. Often this training involves providing the computer system with datasets—which again come from humans—that the system will then utilize to make predictions. There are several challenges to creating AI policy. First, the use of AI is so wide-ranging. All of the other important policy areas that the ESA initiative is tasked with addressing are impacted by AI. Truly, each panel of ESA could dedicate a policy proposal to AI and still there would be much left to regulate. Second, it is challenging for regulation to maintain the pace of technological development and advancement. Thus, sufficient AI policy and regulation must come in two forms: direct and specific regulation aimed at the use of AI, and general policies that directly or indirectly reference AI as it relates to other policy areas and envisions the future of AI. The policy proposals outlined below primarily address the first form of AI regulation, although this panel urges policy makers, scholars, and utilizers of AI to consider these proposals as a foundation, rather than a ceiling, for AI policy. Third, AI regulation should support the ethical development of AI, rather than stifle technological expansion.

This is a balance that has been attempted to be found at the European level, in order to avoid development being restricted only to nations with less strict regulations. However, this balance is difficult to find and maintain, particularly as there is much we do not yet know about AI when it comes to ethical concerns. The European Union Artificial Intelligence Act (EU AI Act) is considered the world's first comprehensive regulation on AI. This European framework has decided to adopt an approach based on the risks that AI can represent. For example, AI systems identified as high risk include AI technology used in migration management or educational training. The policy proposals outlined below identify areas in which the EU AI Act would benefit from more robust protections, suggestions to strengthen other policies that interact with the EU AI Act, and areas in which EU nation states may wish to create national regulations for a comprehensive protective framework. This regulation at the national level could tackle the fact that it can be hard to find common European values. The policies of this panel acknowledge there are some areas—such as issues involving children—which are addressed in the Act but not through an individual article. Thus, the proposals are aimed at addressing five areas of AI use where policies would benefit from being further addressed: misinformation, privacy, and data protection; legal, intellectual property, business and workplace; children, discrimination, and protected persons; medicine and research; and anthropological studies, education and culture. The panel focused on core issues identified within those areas, providing potential solutions for them while trying to keep the information understandable, concise and brief. Absence of specific policy proposals does not indicate a lack of interest or importance but instead a desire to maintain the brevity and concision required of the ESA initiative. AI development will continue moving forward, and EU policy must keep pace. This panel suggests that within twelve months of the initial implementation of the EU AI Act, the following proposals are addressed by the European AI Office, and when applicable, member states.

Recommendations

6.1. The EU must enhance the protection of employees' rights from AI infringement through a standardized legal framework. With the rapid advancements in AI technologies, concerns have arisen regarding the potential infringement of creators' rights and the displacement of human workers. The framework should be focused on the protection of AI-vulnerable employment. It must protect a broad spectrum of livelihoods, for example, self-employed individuals, such as artists and writers, as well as employees in various sectors from AI-based discrimination such as in the recruitment process. Theft of intellectual property would fall on the developers of the AI, as they define the training datasets, or individuals who have retained a model with stolen material. Thus, addressing the challenges posed by AI while promoting equitable employment practices and protecting the basic rights of impacted individuals. This framework should be promoted for implementation by the national governments of the EU member states.

6.2. The EU must broaden the classification of high-risk AI Systems. The EU must take into account AI used for strategic decision-making processes: the morality of the creator, its goals, and its research for efficiency and profit must be balanced with social values and priorities. This category also includes any AI that can be used, directly or indirectly, where national security is compromised. The EU should also take into account Generative AI models: developers must come up with an EU-guided impact assessment beyond fundamental rights (Art. 29 AI Act) that will be validated before making them available on the market. Adding those systems to the classification should include the regulation of the use of deepfakes in pornographic content, misinformation, and lack of diversity in their data. If an AI does not come into one of those categories, guidelines can be given to ensure it's not leading to unwanted impacts. They must ensure AI models and systems are used for a legitimate purpose and prevent it from being used to spread misinformation negatively impacting democratic practices. Non-compliance with the guidelines must lead to penalties.

6.3. Effective educational measures and European age verification. Currently, there are open-access platforms used to produce AI-generated content that is not suitable for children, for example, AI-generated violent content, pornography, or erotic material. It is very well documented how harmful it can be for a child to have early access to this type of content, even more as it may increase their vulnerability to sexual abuse, exploitation, and violence. Member states should implement educational measures (e.g., certified programs) that are suitable for children regarding the use of AI in a way that capacitates them for future challenges and the benefits that AI represents. In addition, a European Age Verification Technology should be implemented at a EU-level to access such services.

6.4. Member states must prevent AI systems from being used to produce or distribute Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM). Recent investigations have found models and platforms of general online access, that are using AI to generate or distribute Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM), threatening fundamental rights and human dignity. These models are used to produce not only AI generated CSAM, but also non-consensual intimate imagery (NCII) of real children and for commercial purposes. To address this, images of children must be excluded from generalized training data sets in AI systems, pursuant art. 8 of the GDPR, as a general prohibition in the EU AI Act or other regulation. However, exceptions can be established only when consented and for legitimate purposes (e.g. scientific research). Additionally, content hosting platforms using AI, must implement Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) detection and removal technology, periodically and retroactively. We propose that this must be established as a legal obligation for providers of these platforms. Whether they find CSAM by themselves or third parties, providers must take immediate measures to report it and remove it.

6.5. Boosting AI literacy: enhancing understanding of potential risks and benefits. AI is a new technology that comes with great risks and biases which people that are unaware and overconfident in the technology can easily overlook. Nevertheless, AI can be beneficial to people (i.e. cancer detection in medical images for patient healthcare). Therefore, AI literacy as stated in the EU AI Act has to be specified through concrete informational routes targeting students, educators, professionals and the general public. These measures are further developing the EC's Digital Education Plan, especially Action 8 and the Digital Competence Framework for Citizens. EU citizens with basic AI knowledge are able to live an autonomous lifestyle in an increasingly AI-digitalized world. This leads to a balanced and informed attitude towards AI. Collaborating with the EU Education Directorate-General and Member States' Education Ministries, the EU should promote certification standards, quality endorsements and AI-focused licensing exams. Further measures include collaborations between the AI Office and national authorities to create and disseminate AI informational campaigns, similar to those during the Covid-19 pandemic. They function as a public introduction to benefits, risks, rights and obligations concerning AI technology. Beginning with pilot programs in volunteer member states these measures can be gradually extended to full-scale implementation.

6.6. Mandatory AI documentation: enhanced transparency, informational rights, and trust in AI tools utilized within the EU. As each AI model works uniquely, fostering transparency, accountability, and compliance with GDPR in AI is a crucial aspect of AI model deployers' responsibilities and could help users be aware of potential misinformation. Various stakeholders are involved, such as the AI Office & Board and other central authorities that oversee AI developers' work, like conformity assessment bodies. Standardized AI Documentation should be established, as well as periodically or randomly reviewed by the AI Office & Board, as a means of documenting the whole AI development process to enable consistent traceability across countries, thus harmonizing the work of different stakeholders while hastening bureaucratic procedures. Such documentation should be concise and accessible, as well as describe and monitor essential information about the AI technology, covering at least five categories of information:

- Model-related information (e.g., model owners, developers, reviewers, applicable license(s));
- Data-related information (training vs. testing data, data types, e.g., imaging, real vs. simulated datasets, data origins);
- Certification & Evaluation related information (model precision, robustness, biases, limitations, and extreme cases, certifications of conformity assessment bodies, and risk score);
- Usage-related information (e.g., statistical distributions, identified failures, memory usage);
- Maintenance-related information (last updates, software versioning, last periodic evaluation, dates, etc.).

6.7. Support AI-research that focuses on human-technology relationships. Current crises are the results of our past actions. These actions include the creation and use of technology. Taking responsibility and trying to solve them, means looking at us and our actions. By researching this, we will find out about the roots of the crises, take responsibility and possibly develop root-addressing solutions or even avoid possible problems beforehand. This should eventually lead to the implementation of educational measures. The EU must hence refine its current "AI"-legislation so that research focus on humans that use and create AI as well as the long-term impact of it is included. Consistent with the addressed problems, the EU needs to take part and support highly inclusive research and education projects (REP) in all sciences in the EU and, later on, partnering countries. REPs within institutions such as the Panel on Planetary Thinking should be supported on all policy instrument-levels (i.a., regulatory, financial, informative instruments) so that they take on the described form. This research would focus on human past, present and future relation towards technology and thus needs to meet the corresponding run time (multiple decades, regular evaluations).

6.8. Enhance digital cultural heritage promotion across the EU. The European Union must allocate resources and support public initiatives to digitize and conserve cultural artifacts. As a result of technology development we have digital methods and technologies, such as high-resolution imaging and AI-powered artifact recognition. Cultural collections should be digitized and archived taking into account places that are less accessible or fragile artifacts, given the importance of ensuring their accessibility for the current and the future generations. Additionally, the EU should invest in the creation of virtual replicas of heritage sites using immersive technologies like virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) to provide immersive educational experiences, promote cultural tourism, and develop even better representation and understanding of the world by AI models. To facilitate data sharing and collaboration among cultural institutions, the EU should establish standards and protocols for open-access repository and provide training opportunities in digital heritage documentation and promotion techniques.



PANEL 7 : European heritage. How can the EU effectively coordinate with institutions the promotion of its heritage and ensure access to culture to all?

Executive summary

European Heritage is a broad topic that ranges from different fields, such as education, culture, science and environment. UNESCO defines Cultural Heritage as "artefacts, monuments, a group of buildings and sites, museums that have a diversity of values including symbolic, historic, artistic, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological, scientific and social significance". Also, there is a need to understand that it encompasses tangible (e.g., castles, museums, works of art), intangible (e.g., songs, traditions, etc.) and digital (born-digital and digitised). Diversified themes need to be addressed by the European Union to harmonise the approach toward European Culture and Heritage, mainly regarding collaboration, awareness, education, inclusion and accessibility. We also should be considerate about the intersection of climate change and cultural heritage. The preservation of historic sites, monuments, and artefacts is not just a cultural imperative but also a sustainability concern. Discussions revolving around potential collaborations between the cultural and sustainability sectors have been particularly insightful and forward-thinking. We firmly believe that collaborative frameworks, targeted educational initiatives, sustainable tourism practices, and a steadfast commitment to cultural diversity and accessibility within the EU are pivotal in overcoming these challenges.

Problem Statement

Our discussions have revolved around the fundamental question of how the EU can effectively coordinate with its diverse institutions to promote its rich heritage and ensure cultural access for all citizens, regardless of background or location. Our exploration has unveiled a vast array of initiatives, legislation, and movements that underline the importance of preserving and celebrating European cultural diversity. Initiatives such as Europa Nostra and the European Capitals of Culture program showcase concerted efforts at the European level to safeguard and promote our shared heritage. Meanwhile, legislative measures such as regulations governing the export of cultural goods, underscore the legal framework designed to protect cultural assets. Movements like Germany's "National Monuments Day", France's tax incentives for restoration work and Portugal's innovative educational program "Cultural Heritage in Schools" are testaments to the grassroots efforts aimed at engaging citizens and instilling a sense of pride in cultural heritage. However, amidst these commendable endeavours, we've identified several formidable challenges that require concerted attention and action:

- Securing Sustainable Funding: Adequate and sustainable funding is vital for cultural projects to thrive and have a lasting impact on communities. Ensuring a steady flow of resources requires innovative funding models and partnerships.

- Coordinating Diverse EU Institutions: Harmonizing strategies and actions among EU institutions involved in cultural heritage preservation and promotion is essential for a cohesive and effective approach. This coordination necessitates robust communication channels, streamlined processes, and shared goals.
- Developing Impactful Educational Programs: Educational initiatives play a pivotal role in fostering cultural awareness, appreciation, and understanding among diverse audiences. Crafting programs that are not only impactful but also economically sustainable is a complex yet critical endeavour.
- Promoting sustainability within the culture domain: Preserving cultural heritage is a double-edged sword-it can both enrich cultural experiences and pose challenges such as overtourism and environmental impact. Embracing sustainability practices is paramount for preserving cultural heritage while promoting inclusivity and diversity in tourism experiences.

Through our collective efforts and policy proposals, we aspire to make substantive contributions to the enhancement, preservation, and promotion of European heritage. Our ultimate goal is to ensure that cultural access is not merely a privilege but a fundamental right for all EU citizens, enriching lives and fostering a deeper appreciation for our shared cultural legacy across generations.

Recommendations

7.1. Developing a multi-layered Approach for Heritage Protection in Urban Environments. This policy proposes a comprehensive plan to safeguard and celebrate Europe's rich urban heritage. Recognizing cities as repositories of centuries-old history and cultural tapestry, the plan aims to ensure their preservation for future generations. The strategy focuses on multiple fronts.
The European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) will provide financial support to local governments for restoration projects and the pragmatic reuse of historic buildings for cultural and educational purposes. Policy frameworks within the EU will be established to ensure sustainable urban development that respects diverse cultural identities and the unique character of each city, both preserving the historic buildings and promoting their use for modern agendas. The plan envisions a strong partnership between EU governments, citizens, cultural organisations, and businesses. This collective effort will leverage resources and expertise for effective heritage protection. Ultimately, the goal is to celebrate the cultural diversity that defines Europe while promoting development within its vibrant urban centres.

7.2. Preserving Cultural Heritage with regards to the climate crisis and sustainability. Building on the Green Deal and the Council Resolution on the EU work plan for culture 2023–2026 (priority area c), we acknowledge that cultural heritage is a clear asset for the green transition and therefore linking the cultural world with the policies aimed at the development of a sustainable society is mutually beneficial for the cultural world and the sustainability challenge. The vulnerability of cultural heritage (through natural causes or overtourism) is increasingly visible in the EU. On that account, building protection and renovation, dialoguing between the cultural sector and sustainability sector and defining and protecting the European identity through the enhancement of already existing EU projects with similar goals (Erasmus +, the European Corpus of Solidarity, the European cultural heritage hub) is strongly needed. The development, the safety of their perpetuation and an even stronger promotion of these programs are key elements.

Through this enhancement, objectives like energy efficiency, awareness of our common endangered and endangering heritage, eco-tourism, support for annual reports from owners of cultural heritage sites or the training of civil society and workers of the cultural sector on the relationship between heritage protection and fight against climate change can be achieved.

7.3. Protecting Minority Languages and Supporting Marginalised Communities. Member States are urged to cooperate with European, national and local institutions to establish dedicated spaces within existing infrastructures for the education and demonstration of minority languages and cultures. Some are especially endangered because few native speakers remain, often due to colonial history, racism and discrimination. This initiative should be funded through the EU's structural funds and cohesion policies, aligning with, and monitored under the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM). This act aims to support both State Language Minorities, at risk of being overshadowed and undervalued as second official languages, as well as European Immigrant Communities, representing growing nationality groups within states, favoring current and future generations in maintaining ties with their native countries. When recognized by a member state, these communities are to be provided with the needed support and financial help. We recommend the establishment of specific funding mechanisms to assist these communities in developing cultural and linguistic programmes incentivizing the acquisition of these languages, along with recognition of pre-existing opportunities within states, ensuring the preservation and promotion of Europe's rich linguistic and cultural heritage.

7.4. Developing an EU Youth Culture Pass to Encourage Cultural Appreciation and Integration. Promoted by the European Commission, in potential collaboration with national and local cultural authorities and youth agencies, the Pass would provide EU residents 18-20 year-olds with additional opportunities to explore the rich diversity of cultural activities across the EU. Recent initiatives are ongoing at a national and local level in some countries. By unifying or encouraging interoperability between these policies, and making them extensive to the rest of the member states, the Culture Pass would offer EU-wide vouchers valid for a year and activable only once to access a broad range of cultural activities, from books and music to concert or museum tickets. Being integrated within the Erasmus programme in the EU's long-term budget, alongside DiscoverEU and related initiatives, the policy would ensure broad accessibility and effectiveness. Implementation will involve close coordination with local authorities, cultural organizations, and the business sector, ensuring comprehensive coverage and impact. As a result, the EU Culture Pass initiative would not only promote cultural awareness and intercultural dialogue but also foster personal, academic, professional and social development for the generation that will shape the future of Europe, by nurturing a shared European identity, while celebrating and preserving the continent's diverse cultural heritage.

7.5. Establishing an Annual European Heritage Competition for Secondary Schools. Promoted by the European Commission, in a potential collaboration with the Council of Europe, educational authorities, and cultural organisations, this competition would engage secondary school students across EU member states in exploring the rich cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, from all corners of Europe.

Drawing from ongoing training programmes in cultural heritage, this initiative would raise awareness on the topic among students through tailored competition levels for different age groups and their integration into school events or themed weeks like European Heritage Days, in order to serve as additional motivation to install interest among teenagers. It would offer digital resources such as webinars, videos, and apps to facilitate learning. Schools are encouraged to showcase their activities online, fostering intercultural communication and cooperation among students. Different stages would be implemented in the form of individual or group quizzes, with a final round, conceivably held in a European Capital of Culture, featuring interactive activities like debates and round table discussions. Potentially funded by the Erasmus program, this initiative would promote awareness, appreciation, and understanding of Europe's diverse cultural heritage among the next generation.

7.6. Promoting Youth Engagement in Cultural Short-Term Volunteering Across Europe. To enhance youth involvement in cultural volunteering across Europe, the proposal advocates for the European Commission to coordinate efforts through initiatives like Eurodesk, Youthletter, and University Alliances. This targets individuals from 18 to 35 years old from all EU countries. The action plan entails specific activities to promote short-term mobility, including targeted funding support, export advice, and tailored publicity campaigns. A dedicated webpage within the European Solidarity Corps platform, focusing on short-term mobilities, would be created, featuring enhanced promotional materials. The policy aims to enhance European cultural understanding, support local communities, and promote cultural awareness and intercultural dialogue among youth. Implementation involves collaboration with local governments, academia, and EU officials across all EU countries. Quarterly application processes, accompanied by extensive promotion on social media platforms, is recommended. The execution process includes developing a comprehensive webpage, conducting promotional activities through various channels, and forging partnerships with NGOs and local governments for outreach and volunteer recruitment. Ultimately, the policy aims to foster greater youth engagement in cultural volunteering, emphasising intercultural understanding, community development and tangible benefits for participants, such as travel vouchers, training programs, flexible volunteering options, awards, recognition schemes, and language support services.

7.7. Establishing dedicated funds for international collaboration on EU cultural heritage. The European Agenda on Culture acknowledges the urgent need to strengthen cross-border collaboration and international cooperation for preserving, researching, and promoting European cultural heritage whether it is tangible or intangible. Currently, a lack of dedicated funds and a harmonised policy framework that focuses on international collaboration on the topic hinders effective action in this domain. Thus, a targeted policy approach that will include the funds' allocation to the promotion and research of European cultural heritage on the supranational level is necessary to address these deficiencies and harness the potential for collaboration and cooperation. By establishing dedicated funds for international collaboration and a comprehensive policy framework based on research and education, the EU can enhance its efforts in safeguarding its cultural heritage, promoting cultural and multilingual diversity, and combating illicit trafficking of cultural goods. The creation of funds can be related to the already existing Creative Europe and Interreg programs with the obligation to focus on international cultural heritage projects. This initiative aligns with the EU's values of cultural cooperation, mutual understanding, and sustainable development. Collaboration will occur both within the EU and with external partners, ensuring a comprehensive approach to cultural heritage preservation and promotion.

PANEL 8 : Cure of the future. What approach should the EU adopt regarding health and more particularly the advancements of biomedicine?

Executive summary

The integration of biomedical advancements into healthcare represents a pivotal opportunity to enhance patient outcomes and alleviate the strain on healthcare systems. Key areas of focus include personalized and predictive medicine, leveraging AI chatbots to optimize initial patient screening, promoting healthy aging through innovative biomedical technologies, implementing biosensors for real-time health monitoring, and combating infectious disease outbreaks through pathogen genoymic surveillance. However, realizing the full potential of these innovations requires overcoming challenges such as regulatory barriers, data security concerns, interoperability issues, and ensuring equitable access to technology and the consideration of minority rights and the socioeconomic backgrounds of patients. Ef ectively addressing these challenges is essential to harnessing the transformative power of biomedical advancements and improving healthcare delivery on an EU-wide scale.

Problem Statement

There's a rising need to redefine the way we deliver care and address the diverse needs of patients worldwide. At the heart of this endeavor lies a multifaceted challenge: to harness the transformative potential of cutting-edge technologies while navigating the complex terrain of healthcare systems, regulations, and societal expectations. One of the cornerstones of this transformation is personalized and predictive medicine. The convergence of genomics, data analytics, and precision therapies holds the promise of tailoring treatments to the individual characteristics of each patient. Yet, the path to widespread adoption is riddled with obstacles from the need for robust infrastructure for genomic sequencing and analysis to the ethical considerations surrounding data privacy and consent. As populations age and the prevalence of chronic diseases continues to rise, enabling aging in place through the use of innovative technologies becomes increasingly urgent. From remote monitoring devices and wearable sensors to smart home automation systems, these technologies have the potential to empower seniors to maintain their independence and quality of life while reducing the burden on formal healthcare services. Yet, barriers such as af ordability, accessibility, and digital literacy must be addressed to ensure that all individuals, regardless of socioeconomic status, can benefit from these advancements. In parallel, the integration of biosensors into healthcare practices holds the promise of revolutionizing diagnostics and disease management by enabling real-time monitoring of physiological parameters and biomarkers. From wearable devices that track vital signs to implantable sensors that detect early signs of disease, these technologies of er unprecedented opportunities for early intervention and personalized treatment strategies. Challenges such as data interoperability, regulatory compliance, and patient acceptance must be overcome to fully realize their potential and ensure widespread adoption in clinical settings. Moreover, ensuring accessibility to advanced therapies across Europe remains a critical challenge.

Disparities in healthcare infrastructure, reimbursement policies, and regulatory frameworks can hinder the equitable distribution of innovative treatments, depriving patients of life-saving interventions based on their geographical location or socioeconomic status. There's a need to harmonize regulations, promote cross-border collaboration, and prioritize the allocation of resources to underserved regions. Meanwhile, the escalating demands on healthcare systems threaten to overwhelm their capacity to deliver timely and ef ective care to all who need it. Here, the emergence of AI presents a compelling solution, of ering the potential to streamline patient interactions and optimize resource allocation. However, concerns about the reliability, accuracy, and ethical implications of AI-driven healthcare tools must be carefully addressed to ensure acceptance and trust among patients and providers alike. Beyond the realm of individual health, the impact of climate change on global health presents a pressing concern, as rising temperatures and environmental degradation fuel the spread of infectious diseases and threaten public health on a global scale. By tracking disease vectors, monitoring air and water quality, and identifying environmental risk factors, with advanced technologies we can perform targeted interventions to mitigate the impact of climate change on human health and safeguard the well-being of communities worldwide. In summary, the successful integration of biomedical advancements into healthcare requires a concerted ef ort to overcome challenges that stand in the way. From technological innovation and regulatory reform to stakeholder engagement and patient empowerment, a multifaceted approach is needed to unlock the full potential of these transformative technologies and ensure that they benefit patients and society as a whole. Only by working together can we overcome these challenges and usher in a new era of personalized, predictive, and proactive healthcare for all.

Recommendations

8.1. Secure investment for the research and development of personalized and predictive medicine in the EU. Transitioning from conventional healthcare methods to innovative, personalized medicine signifies a pivotal evolution in healthcare practices. This approach tailors treatments to individuals' unique genetic, lifestyle, and environmental factors, offering unparalleled potential in anticipating health risks, enhancing treatment effectiveness, and cutting healthcare expenses. To drive this transition, the European Commission, together with Member States and in collaboration with the European Alliance for Personalized Medicine, should establish a unified framework aiming to source investments from government bodies, non-profit research organizations, and private stakeholders towards research and development of cutting-edge personalized and predictive medicine. Examples of such technologies that would enable this include Next-Generation Sequencing (NGS), Single Nucleotide Polymorphisms (SNPs) testing, liquid biopsy and epigenetics research. The framework's core objectives should also include efficient fund allocation, ensuring ethical standards for data sharing, integrating innovative practices into healthcare systems across the EU, and guiding research initiatives through academic institutions, biomedical laboratories, and academic
hospitals. Immediate action is required to synchronize this initiative with the upcoming EU budget cycle, adopting a phased five-year rollout to build the infrastructure, foster technological investments, and ensure comprehensive integration and assessment.

8.2. Strengthen pathways for Advanced Therapy Medicinal Products (ATMPs) in Europe. Europe is on the brink of a new era in medicine with the approval of advanced therapy medicinal products (ATMPs) which will be life-changing for eligible patients and for healthcare systems. Although progress has been made, factors like timely access, acceptability, payment, and reimbursement remain a challenge. Recognising the innovative nature of these products, the European Commission should further promote access to ATMPs by enabling and promoting cross-border supply and reimbursement for patients in an effective and timely manner. We therefore propose the immediate amendment of existing legislation, like the Cross-Border Healthcare Directive and the Social Security Regulations, to include and cover ATMPs, while taking in consideration the socio-economic status, demographic background and geographical location of patients. The adoption of joint clinical assessments at the EU level is another crucial step to facilitate patient access. Such initiative will be led by Health Technology Assessment experts from Europe and will form the basis for national value and health economic assessments and pricing negotiations, thus streamlining the authorisation process and fastening access across the EU. Patient advocacy groups should also be involved to enhance the acceptability of healthcare professionals and institutions, thereby facilitating and accelerating a successful commercialization pathway for these ATMPs.

8.3. Accelerate the uptake of innovative home-based biomedical technologies amongst elderly citizens to improve long-term care. As Europe's population ages rapidly while facing a shortage of healthcare and social workers, innovative biomedical technologies such as fall detection systems, early disease detection tools, telehealth virtual video visits, wireless remote monitoring, and devices that promote physical activity, can empower elderly citizens to take care of their health at home. This would allow for their autonomy and independent living while relieving the burden on formal long-term care services and optimizing resources. Following up on point 5.c. in the Council's recommendation on access to affordable high-quality long-term care, we recommend that the European Commission, in collaboration with all Member States, develop a comprehensive action plan to accelerate the uptake of these technologies among elderly citizens. This could be achieved by increasing digital literacy, providing financial assistance and subsidies, streamlining technology approval processes, and encouraging user-friendly design. An example is establishing local community hubs for the elderly and their caregivers to enhance their knowledge of home-based biomedical technology. The action plan should be crafted without delay, based on the plan-do-check-act cycle, and adaptable to different Member States' healthcare systems.

8.4. Integrate novel wearable biosensors into European healthcare systems to improve patient care. The development of novel wearable biosensors and operating system hardware technologies could have promising benefits in medicine and for patients by enabling real-time and personalized health monitoring which may prevent medical emergencies and overall improve patient care in the EU. Healthcare ministries and departments within each member state should closely work with the European Commission to establish and implement standardized data formats, communication protocols, and qualification frameworks for the integration of novel wearable biosensors in existing healthcare systems by 2030. This includes the development of secure data management platforms and interfaces that enable easy data exchange between biosensors and healthcare providers in general, and emergency departments in particular. As biosensors generate sensitive health data, ethical and privacy concerns should be considered. To address this, robust data encryption and anonymization techniques should be established, while ensuring compliance with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Regulatory requirements for the approval and commercialization of these new biosensor devices and prototypes should be facilitated by all concerned regulatory agencies in the EU including the European Medicine Agency (EMA) and should be in line with Regulation 2021/2282 on health technology assessment (HTAR).

8.5. Reduce patients' waiting time and support healthcare personnel with a trustworthy medical AI assistant. Amidst a severely strained health system, using artificial intelligence (AI) technology to support healthcare professionals can increase operational productivity and reduce administrative costs. The European Commission should establish a dedicated task force to develop and employ an EU-supported AI medical assistant. This assistant will standardize and speed up initial patient assessments through phone or chat interfaces before patients are referred to suitable healthcare professionals who will make the diagnosis and treatment decisions. It would also optimize patient flow, reduce unnecessary hospital visits, and reserve health staff's resources for the most urgent needs. The ethical design and development of the AI medical assistant needs the active participation of key stakeholders including the European Health Union, the European AI Office, healthcare professionals, and patient and minority rights advocacy groups. This approach, which builds upon the 2024 EU AI act, envisions a centralized, cost-effective solution benefiting all member states and will be adaptable to the specific needs and languages of each. Emphasis should be placed on ethical handling, storage, and protection of sensitive medical data in line with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

8.6. Prevent infectious disease outbreaks caused by climate change through strengthened pathogen genomic surveillance. As climate change accelerates natural disasters, global warming, and the melting of Arctic ice, Europe is at risk of infectious disease outbreaks caused by new pathogens with high pandemic or epidemic potential that emerge as a result. To safeguard public health against climate-induced health threats, the EU needs to strengthen Member States' capacities for pathogen genomic surveillance urgently. The European Commission, alongside the Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (HERA) and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), should work with Member States to equip national labs with advanced technologies, training personnel, and supply of reagents. It is also imperative to establish a real-time, EU-wide data-sharing network within the scientific community to track pathogenic microorganisms in the atmosphere, for a better-coordinated monitoring effort that would enable the early detection and early warning of epidemics. National strategies or action plans can be established based on the WHO's recommendations, aiming for full operational capacity by 2032 across all member states.



PANEL 9 : A place for everyone. How can higher education institutions be a place of opportunities for all?

Executive summary

Higher education faces challenges in ensuring inclusivity and opportunities for all. Proposed policies include enhancing disability data collection, establishing accessibility standards, equalising tuition fees, promoting diversity, conducting mental health surveys, fostering collaboration for job orientation and entrepreneurship, and providing mobility grants. Open access initiatives aim to make research more transparent and accessible. Implementing these measures can create more equitable and inclusive higher education environments aligned with European goals of diversity and innovation.

Problem Statement

Despite significant progress in educational inclusivity, persistent barriers within the European Union (EU) undermine equitable access to higher education, particularly for individuals with disabilities and those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. As of 2022, data indicated that 27% of Europeans over the age of 16 live with some form of disability, with only 29% of these individuals pursuing post-secondary education—substantially lower than the 44% among non-disabled people. This discrepancy highlights a systemic issue exacerbated by inadequate facilities, insufficient disability support, and discriminatory practices within the higher education sector. Furthermore, economic barriers, such as discriminatory tuition fee practices and limited information about mobility programs, restrict the participation of students. These factors not only limit individual opportunities but also reduce the diversity of student and faculty bodies, thereby impacting the richness of the educational experience. The existing EU and national policies, including the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 and various member state legislations, have made strides towards inclusivity but fall short in standardising practices across the Union. The absence of unified standards for physical and digital accessibility in educational facilities continues to pose a significant barrier, depriving individuals with disabilities of their fundamental right to education and hindering their ability to engage fully in the academic community. The need for a comprehensive policy overhaul is evident. To genuinely democratise education across the EU, there must be an emphasis on harmonising accessibility standards, expanding support services, and ensuring that educational opportunities are genuinely inclusive and equitable. This involves not only reforming existing legislation but also implementing new, robust measures that address these critical gaps at both the EU and national levels, guided by standardised data collection and sustained by adequate funding and resources for implementation and monitoring.

Recommendations

9.1. Increasing diversity of students, researchers and lecturers in European higher education institutions. It is imperative that European University Alliances provide equal opportunities for all students, researchers and lecturers. The Alliances would benefit from the creation of a diversity and inclusion committee, which develops and monitors the implementation of guidelines ensuring equitable access to higher education for everyone. This would lead to more diversity amongst students, researchers and lecturers regarding their race, ethnicity, class, socio-economic status, gender, nationality, sexual orientation and physical abilities. More diverse perspectives will make the institutions more resilient and flexible to current challenges and fast changing societies while enhancing their open mindedness. The diversity committee will monitor the implementation of the guidelines at each member university by publishing a report on the proceedings and further communicating recommendations on how to create a diversity friendly environment. They will serve as an advisory body at the executive level of each alliance. In addition, they should be given a veto right in the employment process of researchers and lecturers in case the university or faculty neglects the guidelines when hiring new staff.

9.2. Equalising the tuition fee for EU and non-EU students within the same university. As highlighted by Eurydice, more than half of EU27 education systems in both first and second cycle studies charge higher fees (tuition and similar adaptable fees for each country) to international students compared to home students. At the same time, within a given country, individual higher education institutes hold sole discretion over whether to differentiate tuition fees based on nationality. Such discrepancies not only infringe upon the principles of equality that the EU aims to provide but also create and perpetuate discrimination and injustice. According to the IMF, the projected population of elderly in the EU is estimated to be over 54%. Therefore, the EU is in an imperative need of educated youth and charging foreign students will eventually counterfeit EU's economic growth efforts due to lack of labour. As promptly as possible, the European Commission, in collaboration with the Ministries of Education of EU countries, should tackle this discriminatory issue, preventing single higher education institutes from establishing differentiated fees on the basis of applicants' nationality in order to increase EU talent pool. By doing so, the EU would uphold its commitment to fostering equal opportunities and access as well as inclusivity in Higher Education.

9.3. Enhancing Disability Data Collection in Higher Education. To address the imperative for inclusivity and equity in higher education, the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with relevant departments responsible for disability services, should establish standardised disability data collection mechanisms across EU member states in line with chapter 2 of the guidance book by European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights for implementation of UNCRPD stating states parties' obligation to collect data. A specialised team comprising policymakers, data analysts, educators, and representatives from disability advocacy groups should lead the implementation efforts, benefiting higher education institutions and policymakers. The proposed actions include allocating funding and resources to develop tailored survey tools, training programs, and data collection protocols. Implementation will occur across all EU member states in collaboration with local governments, academia, and EU officials, beginning in the next budget cycle for phased rollout and monitoring. Consultation, resource allocation, training, implementation, monitoring, and ongoing analysis of collected data are essential steps.

By outlining these actions, decision-makers will understand the process leading to advancing disability inclusion in higher education across the EU. This collaborative effort underscores the UNCRPD's commitment to creating a more equitable educational landscape for all students.

9.4. Establishing European design standards on higher education facilities accessibility. According to Eurostat, 1 in 4 Europeans over the age of 16 were facing some form of disability in 2022. Twenty percent of them are leaving the special schools they attend early, while an estimate of only 29% strives for accessing mainstream post-secondary education— half the rate compared to non-disabled people (44%). The lack of proper infrastructure constitutes a determining factor that deprives the disabled of their fundamental right to education. Thus, it is urgent the European Commision takes immediate action by making a standardisation request to CEN (European Committee for Standardization) in order to establish specific design guidelines regarding the facilities of higher education institutions across member states. By 2030, the implementation deadline of the SRPDand the Renovation Wave initiative, the project shall be One completed with the contribution of distinguished specialists on construction matters, such as architects and civil engineers. Meeting accessibility requirements, not only promotes mobility and independent living, but also fosters inclusion in education one law at a time, just as the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 by the EU and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities by the United Nations suggest.

9.5. Yearly systematic mental health survey for students, faculty, and administrative staff within higher education institutions. The lack of data on mental health conditions in higher education has led to inadequate policies, programs, interventions, and resource allocation. In higher education institutions (HEIs) , 40% of students experience struggles with mental health, while 1 in 5 experience a mental health disorder. Therefore, there is a crucial need to raise awareness on how students are affected, how to allocate resources, and therefore create their own programs to lower these statistics. European university alliances should create and implement a mental health survey, based on sociodemographic and college-related correlates for students and personnel to fill out annually. In that manner, HEIs the EU gathers data that acknowledges the real struggles of students, and approaches the problem drastically through targeted legislation and funding within the framework of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027, as mental health & wellbeing constitutes one of its goals. Throughout Europe the problem of mental health affecting students' wellbeing is viewed differently, and a shared survey could highlight the issue, and force institutions to take action. Thus, contributing to a better public health. By implementing this policy, European university alliances would ensure adequate and actionable data is gathered for targeted mental health interventions.

9.6. Creating opportunities through collaboration between European University Alliances and the private sector to promote entrepreneurial skills. The European Commission in the framework of Higher Education for Smart Specialisation (HESS) should encourage Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in collaborating and sharing knowledge, the shared know-how can greatly benefit cross-sector corporations and foster innovations. With the help of the European Commission and the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT), HEI can provide structural courses collaborating in job orienteering centres, specialised in providing data for equal opportunities in job seeking and personal branding.

Showcased by previous precedents, these cooperation projects are able to provide human capital for developing new areas of knowledge-based activity. European University Alliances will be provided with specialised personnel that integrate entrepreneurial soft and hard skills based on current market trends and needs. Overall, students and future graduates would benefit from the job orientation centres, alongside collaboration of different higher education institutions programmes in the application of entrepreneurial skills in a number of fields integrating their ideas and products on the market.

9.7. Funding grants and creating guidelines for promotion of mobility programmes to increase participation. In 2020, only 11.2% of EU graduates had experienced temporary stays abroad during their studies, falling short of the 20% benchmark set by the Bologna Process. This lack of participation primarily stems from insufficient information and economic barriers. Roughly 19% of European youth not involved in activities abroad attribute it to a lack of information about available opportunities, while 36% of students could not participate due to financial constraints. In order to tackle the first issue, some standard guidelines should be developed by the European Education and Culture Executive Agency, overseen by the Directorate-General for Communication, and offer a structured framework for all Higher Education Institutions to adhere to. Furthermore, beginning with the 2026 call, each EUA should allocate 5% of its annual budget to ensure mobility for all of their students, defining socio-economic criteria to allocate mobility grants.. These funds would mitigate inequalities stemming from varying costs of living, financial power, and socio-economic conditions, thus strengthening intra-alliance bonds and facilitating an effective pooling of resource, knowledge, and space, in line with the founding values of the European Universities initiative.

9.8. Making scientific publications open and research data accessible for academia and beyond. Many research projects are financed with European funding, but the availability of related publications is still limited by economic barriers. The access to research articles and databases is strongly related to paywalls, leading to an imbalance of access among students and researchers coming from different institutions worldwide. This problem was clearly acknowledged with the "Open Science" document elaborated by Horizon Europe. The European Commission and University Alliances must promote and expand the platform Open Research Europe, in order to make research accessible for each and everyone, disregarding institutional affiliation. Innovative research funding schemes have already been promoted through the Horizon Europe programmes, where each financed project must respect open access guidelines and provide FAIR data (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable). These platforms between European universities must be improved and expanded to promote collaborative research processes and enhance their efficiency and potential impacts beyond the European Union. The measure will have important impacts on students, researchers and external entities. This facilitates cross-border and multidisciplinary research across academia, industries, public authorities and citizens through advanced digital tools and services.



PANEL 10 : EU of tomorrow. How can the EU secure a safe and well guided enlargement in the upcoming years?

Executive summary

Proposals aim to acknowledging the imperative of fostering public support for enlargement, achieved through a targeted pro-enlargement campaign aimed at prevent dispersing misinformation and highlighting the diverse benefits of accession. Economic cooperation stands as the cornerstone of integration, emphasized through strengthening institutional ties and strategic investments in candidate states, reaffirming our commitment to their integration into the Union. A gradual accession with the conditioned approach, coupled with the inclusion of local experts and civil society, ensures a smoother integration process, empowering stakeholders and fostering accountability. Transitioning to qualified majority voting in EU enlargement decisions enhances efficiency and fosters collaboration, reducing the obstacles posed by unanimity. Increasing support to candidate states to improve media freedom and combat misinformation is crucial for upholding democratic values and empowering citizens. Cultural exchange programs like Erasmus+ create the way for a stronger, more unified Union by fostering understanding and cooperation across diverse cultures. Lastly, empowering candidate countries to deter aggression and resist external influence is vital for ensuring the security and stability of the Union.

Problem Statement

The European Union – a unique alliance of 27 diverse nations, spanning over 4 million square kilometers of land, and a population of 448.4 million people. But it's more than just numbers. It is a dynamic community, shaped by the core values of cooperation and solidarity. Each new accession not only expands the geographical reach of the EU but also enhances its ability to play a significant role on the international stage. As we convene to deliberate on the future of the European Union, we confront a series of formidable challenges that underscore the complexity of our enlargement aspirations. The accession of nine candidate states holds the promise of expanding the EU's reach and enhancing its capacity to address global challenges. While existing frameworks such as the Copenhagen Criteria and the European Neighborhood Policy provide avenues for expansion and collaboration, they fall short in comprehensively addressing the multifaceted challenges of enlargement. Brexit serves as a significant reminder of the importance of maintaining integrity and fostering a sense of belonging within our Union, as we navigate the path ahead. The challenges span from overcoming decision making hurdles and resolving regional disputes to addressing low approval rates, combating misinformation, and managing the abrupt transitions on accession day, all of which impede the cohesive advancement of the enlargement process and introduce uncertainties and disruptions for both candidate and member states. In response to these challenges, we propose a series of policy recommendations aimed at refining the enlargement process, fostering cooperation, increasing support for enlargement, streamlining decision-making, and ensuring accessibility and efficiency for all stakeholders involved.

We see enlargement, despite its challenges, as an opportunity rather than a threat. With each new accession, the EU becomes more diverse and inclusive. Enlargement facilitates collaboration in addressing pressing global challenges such as climate change or security threats, amplifying the European Union's collective impact. It represents a promise of a brighter future for all.

Recommendations

10.1. Provide information concerning enlargement for a solid tomorrow's Union. Enlargement stands to bestow remarkable advantages upon the EU, encompassing the advancement of superior environmental, health, social, and consumer standards, the cultivation of peace and stability in neighbouring regions, and the augmentation of prosperity and opportunities for European enterprises and citizens. Nevertheless, owing to misinformation and preconceptions, not all citizens possess a comprehensive understanding of these benefits. To address this, it is recommended to bolster public backing through the initiation of a campaign under the auspices of the Commission, aiming to underline EU enlargement's benefits and eliminate misinformation. Such a campaign, modeled after successful initiatives addressing various issues, would be specifically tailored to resonate with populations in countries exhibiting lower approval rates and should incorporate digital platforms such as accredited websites disseminating reliable information, an active presence on social media, alongside localised physical endeavours like meetings and conferences. The involvement of influential public figures, like national ministers or politicians, will serve to enhance the campaign's credibility.

10.2. Foster economic cooperation between European Union and candidate states through institutional integration and strategic investments. To ensure deeper EU integration of the candidate states, it is imperative for the EU to intensify its engagement with the economies of candidate states. Putting an emphasis on greater institutional integration and incentivising private and public strategic investments within candidate states is vital. According to the Commission's latest communication on pre-enlargement and gradual integration reforms, work is underway to include candidate states to parts of the EU's single market, notably SEPA. The funding schemes financing gradual integration are currently only active for Ukraine, Moldova and Western Balkans (PAP, Growth Plan for Western Balkans) but not Georgia. Aligning these funding schemes in all new candidate states will enable the new candidate states to implement gradual integration. Secondly, incentivizing strategic investments within candidate countries is vital and can be facilitated by the European Investment Bank (EIB) through expanding its mandates and prioritizing strategic investments in candidate countries. This could involve replicating the successful EU4Ukraine mandate by establishing a similar joint mandate for Georgia and Moldova, significantly increasing the EPTATF mandate and creating a spin-out of the *SME Access to Finance Initiative* mandate for candidate states. This fosters regional and economic development of candidate states, underscores the EU's commitment to integrate especially the new candidate states, (Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia) - and highlights the geostrategic significance and urgency of EU expansion.

10.3. Empowering integration : Gradual EU accession and inclusion of experts in progress monitoring. The process of accession to the European Union can be daunting and overwhelming for both member and candidate states. A gradual accession approach, coupled with enhanced participation mechanisms, can address these challenges and foster a smoother integration process.

3a. Gradual Conditional EU Accession

Recognizing the complexities and challenges inherent to EU accession, the implementation of a decisive Staged Accession process as proposed by the Center for European Policy Studies, is crucial, allowing for better adaptation and accommodation by both member and candidate states. This approach incrementally introduces membership benefits and responsibilities based on a candidate's progress in relevant areas, rather than imposing them suddenly on the day of accession. While the Staged Accession methodology would play a crucial role in the formal enlargement process by managing the initiation and conclusion of 'chapters' and 'clusters,' the Growth Plan for the Western Balkans adopted by the European Commission does not present as structural nor does it consider other candidate states. Realizing the financial and institutional benefits of membership should be orchestrated incrementally, rather than being deferred until the moment of accession, thus ensuring a phased and more manageable integration process. This approach not only aims to streamline the integration process but also serves to pre-emptively address potential shocks and crises while actively mitigating Euroscepticism. Reigniting and sustaining the incentives of the candidate states to stay committed to the accession process, Staged Accession can overcome deadlocks if they should arise.

3b. Empowerment and Inclusion of Local Experts and Civil Society

Building upon existing initiatives, such as the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) and European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) - Partnership Agreements and Operational Programmes, the policy urges initiating this process in the forthcoming round of accession negotiations. Also, it highlights the imperative of bolstering participation and monitoring mechanisms, following the principles delineated in the 2020 Revised Enlargement Methodology. This entails active involvement from EU institutions, candidate states' governments, NGOs, and experts. Integrating local expertise and civil society into the policy development and monitoring framework, a tailored approach that enhances both accountability and legitimacy is ensured. This inclusive strategy, implemented from the outset of accession negotiations, not only empowers local stakeholders but also allows for agile and responsive policy implementation, adapting priorities based on both external dynamics and local insights.

10.4. Facilitate inclusion of recent and future candidate states (e.g. Moldova; Ukraine; Georgia) in the instrument for pre-accession assistance. As new candidate states like Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia navigate the path towards EU membership, they face significant challenges in meeting the rigorous criteria set forth by the Union. Critical to their success is the provision of comprehensive financial and technical assistance across various domains such as the rule of law, democracy, and media freedom. Presently, these new candidates rely on support from the "Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe" rather than the more tailored assistance offered by the "Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance" (IPA; current edition: 2021-2027). However, aligning their support under the IPA framework would better reflect their status and allow for more targeted and effective assistance.

To address this, recent candidate states should be included in IPA at the next possible incidence, but at the latest by the commencement of the subsequent IPA edition (IPA IV; presumably from 2028) and receive comparable support until their inclusion. Additionally, future editions of IPA should be reconceptualized to be able to dynamically integrate potential future candidate states even during ongoing editions of the instrument. This adjustment not only ensures that new candidate states receive the necessary support and resources to advance towards EU membership but also streamlines the assistance process, facilitating a smoother transition and fostering closer alignment with EU standards and principles.

10.5. Deepening the Union : Transistion to qualified majority voting in the EU enlargement. To align with the Commission's recent willingness to transition to Qualified Majority Voting (QMV), it is imperative to undertake a thorough shift toward QMV for all enlargement-related matters. This includes crucial stages like initiating and finalizing chapters and clusters. Poised to streamline decision-making processes and alleviate instances of nationalism hindering the accession process, QMV offers a nimbler and more adaptable decision-making framework, preventing individual member states from obstructing progress. To secure consensus among member states, it is imperative to initiate robust discussions and negotiations for this reform in the forthcoming round of EU enlargement deliberations. Rather than diminishing member states' sovereignty, the transition to QMV within the accession negotiations promises to expedite decision making, bolster adaptability, and foster more harmonious negotiations. This policy initiative underscores the critical need for overhauling EU decision-making mechanisms to engender a more effective and inclusive enlargement process. Through this, the EU stands poised to navigate the complexities of enlargement more adeptly, thereby fostering deeper Union and collaboration among its member states, while addressing member state concerns through dialogue, learning from previous transitions to QMV in other areas, and inclusion of safeguards or opt-out clauses where necessary.

10.6. Cultural exchange : Prepare now for a stronger Union tomorrow. A noticeable gap exists in cultural understanding and appreciation among EU member states and candidate countries, hindering cohesion and mutual respect. Cultural appreciation and understanding are crucial for the EU's unity in the perspective of a future unavoidable enlargement - creating solidarity and cooperation and diminishing stereotypes. Cultural exchange programs have increased empathy, understanding, and respect for diverse cultures and the implementation of these initiatives can strengthen the bonds and enhance the global image of the Union as a model of successful integration and cultural diversity. The EU can, first of all, expand existing programs like Erasmus or the European Solidarity Corps: at the moment only North Macedonia, Serbia, and Turkey can fully take part in Erasmus, while other candidates are subjected to criteria and conditions and only Turkey and North Macedonia are "programme countries" in European Solidarity Corps, while the others can take part only in certain activities. In addition, the EU could facilitate short-term exchange programs for individuals, aiming to foster personal connections and understanding across cultural divides. The development of interactive online platforms, which would include virtual tours, language learning resources, and forums for cultural exchange, could also help individuals learn about the cultures of other countries.

10.7. Increase support to candidate states to improve and ensure media freedom and fight misinformation. Media freedom and pluralism are considered a vital part of democracy and of the fundamental rights of citizens by the European Union (EU). The state of media freedom and a strong influence of propaganda, however, remain central issues in many candidate states. Issues include the control of the oligarchy of most large media outlets and consequent high entry barriers into the media market, low foreign media investments, high rates of misinformation and propaganda, low media literacy, the underfunding of independent media and high rates of violence against and lack of protection for journalists. The EU should increase visibility and the range of influence of existing initiatives in this area (e.g. "European Center for Press and Media Freedom"; "European Center for Media Pluralism and Freedom", "Creative Europe", "Media Ownership Mentor") as well as increase support to candidate states and organizations within these states (e.g. increasing funding or encouraging investments into independent media, supporting implementation of new media laws, such as the Ukrainian New Media Law from 2022, or referring to the recently ratified European Media Freedom Act) to assist candidate states in reaching EU membership requirements regarding media freedom and pluralism as well as protect and empower their citizens.

10.8. Empower EU candidate countries to deter aggression and resist external influence from third-party countries. Acknowledging the serious, long-term, and evolving threats facing Europe, the European Union (EU) must proactively foster cooperation between member states & industry, making significant investments under existing frameworks to establish and maintain a resilient and credible capacity to deter aggression. In the short to medium term, the EU must also leverage external suppliers to address shortfalls in European materiel production capacity, particularly in the fulfillment of bilateral obligations to Ukraine. The EU must also collaborate more symbiotically with like-minded partners, organizations and alliance structures to collectively enhance Europe's security posture. Finally, the EU must provide a comprehensive and sustained capacity-building assistance program to aid vulnerable states on Europe's frontier. This necessitates the establishment of Common Security & Defence Policy missions funded under the European Peace Facility to provide long term targeted technical, material and financial support to enhance the capacity of vulnerable states to resist external influence and deter aggression. These missions shall strengthen government institutions, deterrence capabilities, cyber defenses, protection of critical infrastructure and counter-disinformation initiatives. Finally, the efficacy of these missions can be maintained through regular engagement and high-level dialogues and with recipient states. Ultimately laying the groundwork for ensuring a stable, secure and peaceful future for Europe.



PANEL 11 : Addressing euroscepticism. How to build a stronger and more united EU in the face of the rise of euroscepticism?

Executive summary

The rise of eurosceptic voices within the European Union (EU), fueled by populist narratives, fears of faceless bureaucracy and misinformation, poses a significant challenge as we approach the 2024 European Elections and. While a small dose of criticism is vital in a democracy, claims about the EU not founded on facts, and populist sovereignty assertions need to be addressed if we strive to create an ever closer Union. Our approach acknowledges the complexity of Euroscepticism, requiring a nuanced strategy that comprehensively addresses these concerns. Our policy proposals aim to tackle these issues by focusing on three core areas: education, communication, and institutional change. By enhancing education on EU topics, we aim to show the EU's benefits for youth, fostering a new generation of informed voters. Through strategic communication efforts, including EU-led campaigns and pan-European media, we intend to combat misinformation, increase awareness and contribute to creating a pan-European public sphere. Lastly, by advocating for greater involvement of national parliaments in EU governance, we seek to strengthen trust and cooperation between EU institutions, member states, and citizens and address sovereignty concerns.

Problem Statement

According to the Standard Eurobarometer 100 (2023) only 44% of EU citizens see the EU as positive and 45% of Europeans tend not to trust the EU. The survey also shows that half of the respondents feel they are well informed about the European Union, while the Eurobarometer on Citizenship and Democracy (2023) reveals that 78% of Europeans feel their fellow citizens base their voting decision on disinformation. These data indicate a concerning sentiment that voters either do not trust the democratic decision making mechanisms or are not confident of their own level of knowledge about the European Union. Moreover, the spread of misinformation in the EU has become a serious threat for the quality of democracy in the EU. The data shows that 83% of people think disinformation threatens democracy while 51% of Europeans think they have been exposed to disinformation online. The European Commission has already addressed the issues of lack of knowledge and awareness through for example The Digital Strategy on Media Literacy including European Media Literacy Week and European Media Literacy Awards. The European Commission has also stated that 63% of young Europeans come across fake news more than once a week and that half of the Europeans think they have been exposed to disinformation (2022) in the EU Code of Practice on Disinformation which calls for detecting and noticing the false information and encouraging the private sector to take actions against the misinformation. However, the policy recommendations here aim for creating the means and tools of action which expertises on addressing the eurosceptic voices, especially concentrating on breaking the myths and reducing false information about the work and functions of the European Union rather than just talking about media literacy in general.

These proposals also aim for strengthening the already existing channels of communication and educational cooperation across the European Union like Erasmus+, and national actors and private sector by gathering the relevant information more clearly to coherent yet diverse distribution channels: There currently does not exist a pan-European media broadcaster and official accounts of the EU which would be available in all member states and available in as many language as possible.

Recommendations

11.1. Promoting the celebration of Europe Day in schools across the continent to increase knowledge about the EU. Europe Day, often overlooked, presents a valuable opportunity to foster awareness and education about the EU, particularly amongst the younger generations. The proposal aims to enhance Europe Day in schools across the continent through a structured approach, while considering EU's limited competence in the area of education. The aim would be achieved by the suggestion by part of the Union of diverse Europe-related activities, which would be supported by the institutions and implemented by schools locally at every educational level. By focusing on yearly topics relevant to young people's lives (e.g. the EU and climate change, European history, the EU and social inequality) and providing schools with the resources and content, the framework made available would allow schools to choose the form they favor the activities to take place in. With students engaging in workshops, debates, and discussions, the implementation of the proposal would strengthen the idea and understanding of European. Importantly, it would encourage collaboration between schools and educators in promoting European values and appreciating diverse interpretations of Europe, while respecting the sovereignty of Member States on educational matters.

11.2. Enhancing the Erasmus+ Experience by Implementing an Extra Module on General European Knowledge. Since the creation of Erasmus +, more than 1 million students were able to study abroad thanks to EU's financial and administrative support. However, it did not fully allow them to enhance their European knowledge and learn about the mechanism that offered them such an opportunity. This proposal aims to complete the program in order to make Erasmus + students representatives of the European Union. We propose the creation of an educational unit for students willing to participate in an Erasmus+ program. This module would be an integral part of the inscription process to the program and will result in the delivery of a certificate, necessary to take part in an Erasmus + program. It will stress on enhancing the student's understanding and knowledge of the European Union, as direct beneficiaries of their programs. The module would be organized around three topics which each would highlight the role of the EU in these mobilities. The program would include several short course's materials addressing the institutional structure of the Union or its values.

11.3. Establishing an EU media broadcaster to enhance a pan-European public sphere. In recognition of the media's pivotal role in tackling the spread of misinformation, the proposal advocates for creating an official EU media broadcaster. Accessible via TV and online platforms, it will be freely available in all Member States, offering content in all the Union's official languages with comprehensive subtitling and dubbing. By doing so, transgenerational gaps will be covered by linking traditional media consumption with on-demand access and multi-platform usage.

With a focus on promoting EU affairs coverage, and European culture and cinema, it will operate within the already existing Creative Europe MEDIA programme, receiving support for audience development and outreach campaigns. Embracing technological advancements, innovative techniques will enhance audience engagement and cultural dialogue. Regular evaluations will ensure alignment with EU cultural objectives and effectiveness in reaching diverse audiences. By establishing the EU media broadcaster, the EU would reaffirm its commitment to strengthening the Union's public sphere, and fostering a shared sense of identity while celebrating the richness of European culture.

11.4. "EUmythbusters": Combating Disinformation through Funding Independent Research Hubs. The aim of the policy is to counteract the proliferation of false information concerning the European Union and its institutions, while concurrently fostering trust and comprehensiveness across both public domains and social media platforms. To achieve this aim, the European Commission will allocate financial resources to independent entities, facilitated through the EUmythbusters grant, specialising in the mitigation of disinformation at the national level. The core focus of these bodies will be to debunk misleading narratives pertaining to EU-related issues and to elucidate EU policies using more accessible language. Operating across various social media platforms, the independent bodies would assume responsibility for the generation of content specifically tailored to address Eurosceptic myths. This grant scheme will function on an annual cycle, culminating in the submission of comprehensive reports to the Commission by the participating bodies, thereby ensuring accountability and efficacy in the implementation of the proposed policy.

11.5. Increasing awareness about the use of EU funds through TV advertisements. To combat Euroscepticism among European citizens and enhance public understanding of the European Union, targeted media campaigns can prove to be essential. Insufficient information on EU programs and their impact fosters Euroscepticism and inhibits citizen engagement. To address this, focused communication strategies are essential and targeted communication strategies are essential to bridge the information gap and build a more informed and engaged European. It is suggested developing engaging TV advertisements in collaboration with national broadcasters to explain EU structures, budget allocations, and local impact. Specific attention is given to actions aimed at fostering transparency to raise awareness about EU budget allocation through TV ads, detailing fund distribution across policy areas and regions, in order to highlight EU's beneficial aspects. Additionally, it is recommended to empower local communities to share EU initiatives by supporting them in producing media content showcasing EU-funded projects that directly affects said local communities.
These actions seek to bridge the information gap, promote transparency, and foster a more informed and engaged European citizenry.

11.6. Revise the legislative process by allowing National Parliaments to submit legislative proposals. (This proposal would require a treaty revision in order to be adopted) This proposal advocates for the set up of a formal mechanism allowing National Parliaments to submit legislative proposals to the European Commission, as it is already possible for citizens through the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI). It would allow tackling the perceived democratic deficit by making national parliaments more involved in the legislative process. This would cut the distance between national and European priorities, and give the National Parliaments the chance to bring up issues to the European level.

05 | VOTING PROCEDURES

Submission of Recommendations

To prepare for the voting, participants engaged in interpanel debates and discussed potential objections during the second day. Following these debates, they finalised their recommendations. All recommendations were submitted by 5 pm on Thursday, 11th April to be eligible for consideration. This ensured that all proposals were received within the designated timeframe.

Voting Process

During the voting process, the panel coordinator was allotted up to 5 minutes to present the recommendations of their respective panel.

Recommendations were then voted upon individually, employing a simple majority of the expressed votes to determine the outcome. A rejected recommendation was indicated by a red light, while an adopted recommendation was indicated by a green light. The resullts of the vote are recorded in the section below.

Final Recommendations

Following the voting process, the adopted recommendations were compiled in this document. The results of the vote is also published in this document. This document will be used for dissemination purposes.



06 | VOTING RESULTS

Panel	Policy	In Favor
Panel 1 *European Election Year*	1.1 **Preventing Misinformation among Social Media Users: AI Algorithms, Track of False Information's Evolution and Educational Content on the Dangers of Misinformation**	84%
	1.2 **EU Student Ambassadors to Educate Future European Voters**	84%
	1.3 **Empowering Citizens through EU Podcast Education**	72%
	1.4 **Encouraging Voters: Social Media Campaigns by European University Alliances**	82%
	1.5 **Introducing Transnational Electoral Lists and Harmonised Voting Slips in European Elections**	46%
	1.6 **Preferential Voting System in EU Elections: Ranking Candidates for Better Representation**	52%
	1.7 **Strengthen the Parliament: Bicameral System with the Parliament and the Council**	66%
	1.8 **Giving the EU the tools to protect its values and budget: reforming Article 7 of the Treaty on the European Union**	75%
Panel 2 *Greener is Better*	2.1 **Fare Play: Transforming Short-Haul Flights into Green Railway Travel**	69%
	2.2 **NatureComp, the directive for nature compensation that ensures a just treatment of the environment**	88%
	2.3 **AgriTechEU+: Empowering farmers through cutting-edge agritech tools & training**	92%
	2.4 **Fostering Transparency in EU-Global South Sustainability Partnerships**	92%
	2.5 **Greentegrity: Combatting Greenwashing with Eco-psychology Certificates**	67%
	2.6 **Seeds of Change: Sustainable Urban Farming and Forests for Europe's Resilient Cities**	91%
	2.7 **Unleashing Nuclear Power's Potential in EU Policy**	67%
	2.8 **Enabling a Green Future: Sustainable Growth for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)**	87%

Panel	Policy	In Favor
Panel 3 *Cohesion through budget policies*	3.1 **Digital Transformation for Social Inclusion and Cohesion**	86%
	3.2 **Better CAP (Common Agricultural Policy) for a better tomorrow**	80%
	3.3 **Taxing aviation to boost EU rail connectivity**	53%
	3.4 **Europeanization of vocational schools**	69%
	3.5 **Enhancing Accountability and Transparency in Fund Use**	89%
	3.6 **Maximising the efficiency of the EU fundings distribution**	81%
	3.7 **Reducing inefficiencies in EU defence spending**	51%
Panel 4 *Seeking a better future in the EU*	4.1 **Human Rights Compliance in Future Migration Agreements with Third Countries**	87%
	4.2 **Safeguarding European Union's borders in compliance with Human Rights**	85%
	4.3 **Creating an EU agency responsible for processing all migrants coming to the EU**	65%
	4.4 **Guaranteeing migrants a minimum standard of adequate access to national services**	85%
	4.5 **Ensure the right to adequate accommodation for asylum seekers**	84%
	4.6 **Encourage EU-wide Job-Seeking Permit fostering transnational mobility of migrants**	78%
	4.7 **Encouraging family reunification through financial support from Member states**	64%
	4.8 **Create an EU Grant Programme to maintain public willingness to support migrants**	62%

Panel	Policy	In Favor
Panel 5 *EU in the world*	5.1 **Strengthening Sustainable Development Accountability in EU Trade Agreements: Establishing a Spillover Monitoring Framework**	87%
	5.2 **Enhancing EU's Response to the Refugee Crises in host countries**	82%
	5.3 **Promoting Quantifiable Sustainable International Trade through Small and Medium (SMEs) sized Partnerships**	85%
	5.4 **Change in EU's Strategic Approach to Israel-Palestine Conflict: Prioritizing Stability, Diplomacy and EU values**	73%
	5.5 **Strengthening the Space Policy of the European Union by promoting research and international cooperation**	89%
	5.6 **An integrated approach to enhance conflict prevention and peace-building**	83%
	5.7 **Encouraging conscious tourism internationally to strengthen cultural ties**	74%
	5.8 **Promoting positive changes in the EU-Egypt relationship with a focus on human rights and democratic practices**	66%
Panel 6 *EU Artificial Intelligence Act*	6.1 **The EU must enhance the protection of employees' rights from AI infringement through a standardized legal framework**	89%
	6.2 **The EU must broaden the classification of high-risk AI Systems**	91%
	6.3 **Effective educational measures and European age verification**	80%
	6.4 **Member states must prevent AI systems from being used to produce or distribute Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM)**	96%
	6.5 **Boosting AI literacy: enhancing understanding of potential risks and benefits**	91%
	6.6 **Mandatory AI documentation: enhanced transparency, informational rights, and trust in AI tools utilized within the EU**	87%
	6.7 **Support AI-research that focuses on human-technology relationships**	78%
	6.8 **Enhance digital cultural heritage promotion across the EU**	80%

Panel	Policy	In Favor
Panel 7 *European Heritage*	7.1 **Developing a multi-layered Approach for Heritage Protection in Urban Environments**	95%
	7.2 **Preserving Cultural Heritage with regards to the climate crisis and sustainability**	88%
	7.3 **Protecting Minority Languages and Supporting Marginalised Communities**	89%
	7.4 **Developing an EU Youth Culture Pass to Encourage Cultural Appreciation and Integration**	86%
	7.5 **Establishing an Annual European Heritage Competition for Secondary Schools**	70%
	7.6 **Promoting Youth Engagement in Cultural Short-Term Volunteering Across Europe**	88%
	7.7 **Establishing dedicated funds for international collaboration on EU cultural heritage**	83%
Panel 8 *Cure of the future*	8.1 **Secure investment for the research and development of personalized and predictive medicine in the EU**	95%
	8.2 **Strengthen pathways for Advanced Therapy Medicinal Products (ATMPs) in Europe**	98%
	8.3 **Accelerate the uptake of innovative home-based biomedical technologies amongst elderly citizens to improve long-term care**	85%
	8.4 **Integrate novel wearable biosensors into European healthcare systems to improve patient care**	80%
	8.5 **Reduce patients' waiting time and support healthcare personnel with a trustworthy medical AI assistant**	66%
	8.6 **Prevent infectious disease outbreaks caused by climate change through strengthened pathogen genomic surveillance**	89%

Panel	Policy	In Favor
Panel 9 *A place for everyone*	9.1 **Increasing diversity of students, researchers and lecturers in European higher education institutions**	85%
	9.2 **Equalising the tuition fee for EU and non-EU students within the same university**	62%
	9.3 **Enhancing Disability Data Collection in Higher Education**	88%
	9.4 **Establishing European design standards on higher education facilities accessibility**	94%
	9.5 **Yearly systematic mental health survey for students, faculty, and administrative staff within higher education institutions**	83%
	9.6 **Creating opportunities through collaboration between European University Alliances and the private sector to promote entrepreneurial skills**	91%
	9.7 **Funding grants and creating guidelines for promotion of mobility programmes to increase participation**	91%
	9.8 **Making scientific publications open and research data accessible for academia and beyond**	96%
Panel 10 *EU of tomorrow*	10.1 **Provide information concerning enlargement for a solid tomorrow's union**	76%
	10.2 **Foster economic cooperation between European Union and candidate states through institutional integration and strategic investments.**	76%
	10.3 **Empowering integration: Gradual EU accession and inclusion of experts in progress monitoring**	71%
	10.4 **Facilitate inclusion of recent and future candidate states (e.g. Moldova; Ukraine; Georgia) in the instrument for pre-accession assistance**	71%
	10.5 **Deepening the Union: transition to qualified majority in EU enlargement**	50%
	10.6 **Cultural exchange: prepare now for a stronger Union tomorrow**	74%
	10.7 **Increase support to candidate states to improve and ensure media freedom and fight misinformation**	74%
	10.8 **Empower EU Candidate countries to deter aggression and resist external influence from third-party countries**	60%

Panel	Policy	In Favor
Panel 11 *Addressing euroscepticism*	11.1 **Promoting the celebration of Europe Day in schools across the continent to increase knowledge about the EU**	82%
	11.2 **Enhancing the Erasmus+ Experience by Implementing an Extra Module on General European Knowledge**	77%
	11.3 **Establishing an EU media broadcaster to enhance a pan-European public sphere**	65%
	11.4 **"EUmythbusters": Combating Disinformation through Funding Independent Research Hubs**	65%
	11.5 **Increasing awareness about the use of EU funds through TV advertisements**	49%
	11.6 **Revise the legislative process by allowing National Parliaments to submit legislative proposals**	36%



PANEL 1

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