



#EngagEURCouncil

# Online workshops instead of face-to-face meetings: Youth participation in times of contact and travel restrictions

*Final report on the first project cycle  
(March 2020 - June 2020)*

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**ip** Institut für  
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## Online workshops instead of face-to-face meetings: Youth participation in times of contact and travel restrictions

Whether fighting climate change and rising racism, populism and nationalism, defending freedom of opinion and speech or framing the future of Europe – young EU citizens are increasingly and vehemently campaigning for issues of relevance to society as a whole. With the youth participation project “#EngagEURCouncil - Youth exchange and youth participation” Institut für Europäische Politik e.V. (IEP) offers young citizens from Germany, Slovenia and Portugal the opportunity to develop (European) political ideas and demands in a joint and well-founded way. The project runs from 2020 to the end of 2021 and is divided in four project cycles. During the first half of 2020, the first project cycle aimed to bring together young citizens from these three EU Member States to develop ideas for the German EU Council Presidency in the second half of 2020 starting on 1 July 2020. But then the global COVID-19 pandemic thwarted these plans. Like thousands of other conferences, trade fairs or business trips, #EngagEURCouncil had to adapt to the “new normal”. This means: online workshops instead of seminars and face-to-face meetings.

### *The “Trio Presidency” as a framework for #EngagEURCouncil*

Already in 2019 young Europeans developed ideas for the future of Europe under the motto of the IEP project #EngagEU (more information can be found [here](#)). With the current project #EngagEURCouncil IEP draws attention to youth participation and connects it to the Council of the EU and its changing presidencies. In so-called “Trio Presidencies” of successive member states, the Council presidencies coordinate agendas, priorities and reform proposals with each other to ensure continuous and coherent action at the European level. The current “Trio Presidency” partners (2020 - 2021) are made up of Germany (July - December 2020), Portugal (January - June 2021) and Slovenia (July - December 2021). This constellation is reflected in #EngagEURCouncil, where young citizens from Germany, Portugal and Slovenia jointly formulate ideas and demands in three project cycles preceding the respective presidencies. The first project cycle lasted from March to June 2020 and brought together 24 motivated participants.



They became members of the #EngagEURCouncil Virtual Think Tank – the centre of the idea development process – which IEP designed together with Planpolitik. In four virtual meetings of the working groups “Asylum & Migration Policy”, “Climate Policy”, “Foreign Policy” and “Future of Europe” between 6 May and 3 June 2020, specific ideas and reform proposals were developed. Between the individual web seminars, the virtual think tank was both a platform for discussion and voting and a source of information with prepared background dossiers, for example on the Council of the EU, its changing presidencies and various policy areas.

*Project kick-off: No good idea without adequate background information*

On 6 May 2020 the first virtual session took place. Its aim was to get to know the participants and at the same time familiarise them with the virtual think tank. Dr Funda Tekin, Director at IEP, encouraged the young participants to take on new perspectives in the face of current challenges at EU level and not to shy away from developing innovative solutions to deadlocked negotiations.

The entire #EngagEU Council project is based on the maxim: no good idea without adequate background information. Accordingly, IEP attached great importance to the transfer of knowledge during the course of the project. Therefore, after the first session of getting to know each other, the participants were invited to deepen their knowledge about the functioning of the EU Council Presidency. IEP had provided respective information packages on the website of the virtual think tank. In the second virtual session on 13 May 2020, Minna Ålander (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Berlin), expert on the political system of the EU, answered questions on the functioning of the EU Council Presidency and the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the German Council Presidency. On the basis of the knowledge conveyed, the participants discussed the questions of whether the lack of coordination between the EU Member States at the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis had weakened citizens' confidence in the EU institutions and what impact the pandemic will have on the German EU Presidency. The participants agreed that the German assumption of the Presidency of the Council on 1 July 2020 could be a "fortunate coincidence": As an important member state, Germany had a respected and highly developed mediation and moderation competence, which it could use in the difficult negotiations between the member states, especially in view of the already acute economic recession in the EU.





### *Idea development in four working groups*

In the run-up to the third virtual meeting on 19 May 2020, the participants drafted and discussed initial ideas and topics in their respective working groups. On this basis, the third web seminar offered the opportunity to refine these drafts with the support of renowned experts. Dr Anna Stahl (Jacques Delors Centre, Berlin) provided her knowledge for the working group “Foreign Policy” and Heiner von Lüpke (Deutsches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung, Berlin) for the working group “Climate Policy”. IEP complemented these competences with in-house expertise: Dr Funda Tekin supported the working group “Asylum & Migration Policy” and Johannes Kohls the group “Future of Europe”. Short inputs of the respective experts helped the participants to work out their ideas in virtual small groups and to present them in the plenary afterwards.

Afterwards, the participants had two weeks to finalise their ideas in the working groups using the virtual platform of the virtual think tank and to vote on the best and potentially most influential ideas in the plenary – including, for example, the coordination and consolidation of development policy at the European level rather than at Member State level, or the expansion of the European rail network both as a climate-friendly means of transport and as a stimulus measure in view of the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. The creation of a permanent European Citizens’ Assembly to be able to address proposals directly to the European Parliament or the Council of the EU also met with great approval among the participants.

In a Writing Workshop, the fourth and last virtual session, the participants sharpened their ideas and supported them with arguments to increase the persuasive power of the ideas. During the workshop, particular attention was paid to the institutional/stakeholder level and thus also to the question of whether the German Council Presidency is the appropriate addressee for these proposals.


### *Completion of the project cycle and presentation of ideas at the Pre-Presidency Conference*

The participants selected a total of four rapporteurs who presented the jointly developed ideas at the German EU Pre-Presidency Conference “Shaping the Future of Europe” on 25 and 26 June 2020. This conference was organised by IEP in cooperation with the Trans European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA) and offered the opportunity to discuss the ideas in virtual panels and to present them to Axel Dittmann, Director for EU Institutional Affairs, Brexit and EU Coordination at the Federal Foreign Office.



Simon Happersberger (Delegation Asylum & Migration Policy), for example, called on the EU to stop the criminalisation of organisations for sea rescue or integration and to provide financial support to host communities. Maša Ocvirk (Delegation Foreign Policy) argued for the introduction of qualified majority voting in the Foreign Affairs Council on human rights issues to improve the EU's decision-making capacity. Stephan Naumann (Delegation Climate Policy) illustrated the ideas of his delegation with the appeal "We need climate protection - now!" To this end, he presented, among other things, the idea of expanding and better coordinating the European railway networks. João Gomes (Delegation Future of Europe) proposed the introduction of a European Citizens' Assembly, in which the population can contribute ideas to the policy cycle in a representative way for the EU Member States.

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### Asylum & Migration Policy

- End Humanitarian Emergency in the Mediterranean Sea
- Stop Criminalization of Organizations that Support and Provide Aid to Refugees
- Support Local and Regional Coalitions of the Willing

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### Climate Policy

- Green innovation package – a real Green Deal
- European Rail System
- Participatory solutions

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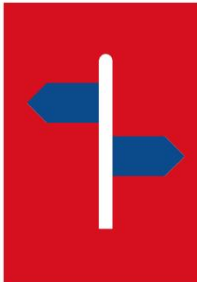
#youthideas



### Foreign Policy

- Introduce qualified majority voting in Common Foreign and Security Policy matters
- Promoting and protecting Europe's values and human rights in the world
- Reform of EU Official Development Assistance (ODA)

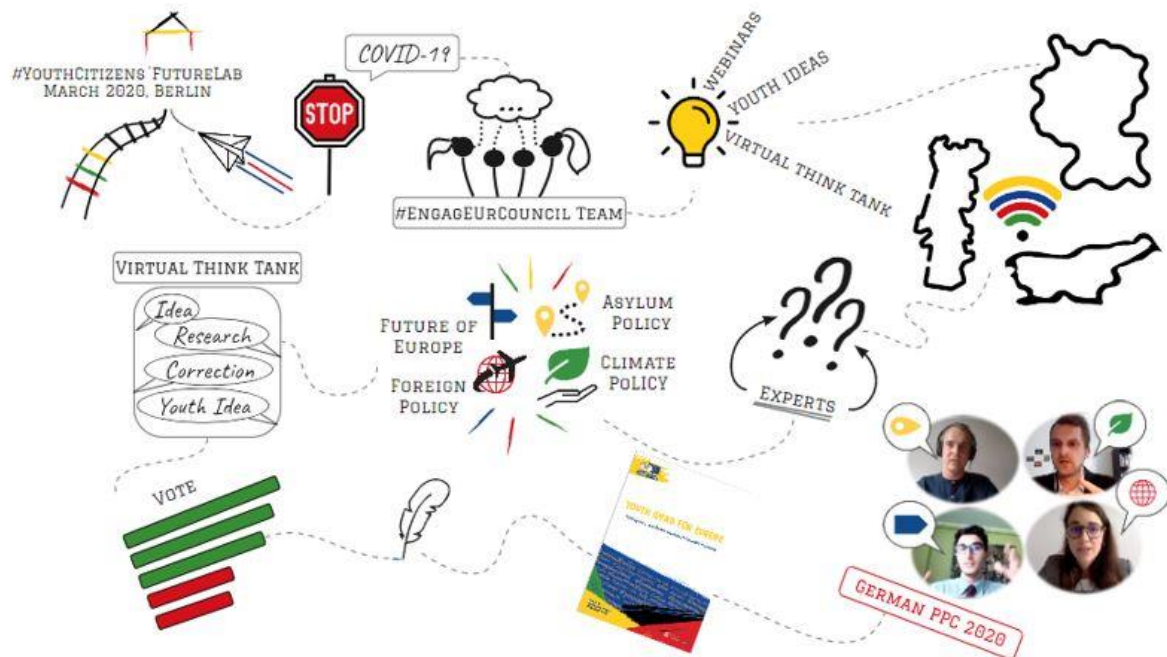
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### Future of Europe

- Develop a unified Political Science Education Hub
- Create an European citizens' assembly
- Create European-wide itinerant cultural events

The first project cycle of #EngagEURCouncil for the German Council Presidency shows that despite the COVID-19 pandemic and the necessary rapid digital restructuring of the project, a constructive and very successful idea development is possible (the concrete Youth Ideas can be found [here](#)). The positive experiences with the virtual think tank are guiding the planning of the second project cycle for the Portuguese Council Presidency from October 2020, which will also take place in virtual space. It remains to be hoped that the third project cycle for the Slovenian Council Presidency from January 2021 can again take place without contact and travel restrictions, since personal meetings and getting to know European citizens on the spot remain irreplaceable for the European idea.



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*The project is implemented by IEP in close cooperation with Instituto Português de Relações Internacionais, Lisbon, and Centre of International Relations, Ljubljana. The project partners also cooperate with the Trans European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA) in Brussels within the framework of the so-called TEPSA Pre-Presidency Conferences in order to ensure a Europe-wide coverage of the project and its activities.*