



#EngagEUrCouncil

YOUTH IDEAS FOR EUROPE

Setting the Scene for the Portuguese EU Council Presidency

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YoungIdeasPanel #EUinfluencer #Empowerment
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Youth Ideas for the Portuguese Council Presidency:

Moral impulse, inspiring perspectives and concrete policy recommendations

As second in line of the Trio Presidency with Germany and Slovenia, Portugal takes over the rotating six-month Presidency of the Council of the European Union on 1 January 2021. After several months of hard negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework, the recovery instrument “Next Generation EU”, and the future relations between the United Kingdom and the European Union, Portugal will be in charge of following up on the outcome of such negotiations, while setting the agenda with its own priorities. These are likely to impact the European Union and its citizens for years and potentially even generations – including the perspective of the younger generation on current challenges hence is of utmost importance. This is the aim of the youth participation and youth exchange project #EngagEURCouncil which provided 26 young Europeans from Portugal, Germany, and Slovenia with knowledge and skills to formulate Youth Ideas for the Portuguese Council Presidency.

The 12 Youth Ideas presented here emerge as highly relevant and in touch with the priorities of the Portuguese Council Presidency. From the point of view of the Presidency these are inspiring perspectives, which reflect a moral impulse, as well as concrete policy ideas that will be certainly reflected upon by policy makers. I would focus on three points:

First, the concern with social cohesion that is at the core of the proposals. The younger generation worries that the implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Plan and the new Multiannual Financial Framework is done in a fair, equitable and transparent manner, proposing anti-corruption measures that impede their misuse. In addition, showing their concern with future growth and the modernisation of the European economy, there is great emphasis that an important investment is linked to the green and digital economy. The focus on the objectives of enhancing social cohesion is also highly relevant in the discussions, with proposals hinging on the best way to respond to the crisis and promote growth, employment, professional qualifications. Top priorities are the idea of a fair minimum wage in all Member States, social protection and inclusion, equal pay and gender equality. Gender equality, directed at closing the pay gap, are an operationalisation of the concerns of the Portuguese Presidency that is most welcome.

Second, youth moral concerns are also present in the proposals related with the preservation of European values, the strengthening of democracy, the preservation of the rule of law and of human rights and fundamental freedoms. More concretely, the proposals are strong on the reinstatement of the Mission Sophia, as a way to save lives in the Mediterranean. Equally, the concern for human rights in the trade relations, and conditionality of these trade pacts is put at the center of the proposals here summarised.

Third, the Youth Ideas focus on foreign policy, with a strong Atlanticist perspective and a practical concern for an effective policy-making at EU level. Such concerns are as pertinent as they are timely, when the transatlantic relationship is at stake and Portugal takes responsibility in this process.

I am certain that the exercise here summarized will be an inspiration for policy makers in Lisbon, Brussels and the remainder of the European capitals.

Madalena Meyer Resende,
researcher Portuguese Institute of International Relations,
NOVA University of Lisbon.

The project “#EngagEUrCouncil: Youth exchange and youth participation” is implemented by Institut für Europäische Politik (IEP) e.V. Berlin 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.

We would like to thank Stiftung Mercator for funding the project, and the Europe for Citizens Programme of the European Commission that supports IEP.

Social Policy

Economic and social inequality have risen sharply all across Europe since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the #EngagEU Council Delegation for Social Policy calls upon the European Commission and the Council of the European Union not only to ensure the economic stability of the European Union (EU), but also to address the underlying social issues such as the growing gender inequality to stop undermining the social cohesion within the EU and its citizens.

▶ **Agree on common criteria to calculate adequate minimum wages in each member state**

We strongly believe that a minimum wage can contribute to the fight against poverty and help promoting social justice. We therefore greatly welcome the Council's conclusions on the minimum income protection adopted on 9 October 2020 and highly support the European Commission's proposal for an adequate minimum wage in the EU presented on 28 October 2020. Furthermore, we propose that appropriate Council configurations – mainly the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO) and the Economic and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN), work on a formula that would allow every country to calculate its own national minimum wage based on the standards of living and the economic situation in the respective Member State, and ensure that this measure is implemented as soon as possible.

▶ **“The Social Resilience Package” for more equality**

We greatly welcome the implementation of the Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE) aiming at protecting EU citizens and mitigating the socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, we invite the Commission to develop a new proposal moving even further. Instead of distributing funds from “SURE” and other loans to enterprises and companies, Member States could tackle the social indicators such as poverty, education and NEET (Young people neither in employment nor in education and training) rates by redistributing money to help to achieve, maintain and even increase equality. As a result, each state would focus on using funds for a social resilience package, thus helping to improve its status quo on social indicators. We believe that such a package will help member states not only to recover from the current crisis, but also consolidate the values of the EU among its citizens.

▶ **Let's close the Gender pay gap (GPG), now.**

The pandemic has increased the gender inequality in many Member States. Women are now even more likely to quit their jobs to assume unpaid care work. We therefore highly welcome the Commission's proposal for a new Strategy on Gender Equality and emphasise that this strategy should be particularly ambitious in light of current circumstances. More than ever, it is crucial to implement measures to close the GPG. We therefore call upon the Portuguese Council Presidency, the EU Member States and the European Commission to prioritise the following issues: i) an educational intervention aimed at promoting initiatives that deconstruct gender roles, maximising the number of women that take well paid Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) careers or reach decision-making positions, and minimising sectoral segregation; ii) the implementation of social laws that create social support for families, through public institutions and promote parental leave for both parents; iii) the implementation of wage transparency policies to establish fair incomes, and promote flexible work schedules; iv) an ongoing supervision to ensure the adoption of the implemented measures.

As representatives of the European Youth, we therefore urge you, the EU Member States, to take action in order to ensure the realisation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, and to overcome these growing inequalities across Europe.



The European Union (EU) is an ever-evolving post-war construct which plays an important role for peace and security on the European Continent. A considerable economic and political value is attached to the European Union – amongst Member states – but also with external trading partners. The #EngagEUR Council Delegation on Trade Policy thus calls upon the Portuguese Council Presidency to make use of this vital policy field of the EU so that it is not limited to its borders but also aligned with all strategic partners.

Red Lines in Free Trade Agreements (FTAs)

We acknowledge the idea of free trade. Yet, red lines – from an environmental and human rights perspective – within existing FTAs must be highlighted e.g. by the Chief Trade Enforcement Officer. Beyond this, we strongly encourage the European Commission to consider three environmental protection lines for potential trading relations consisting of:

- Implementing a threshold regarding the total percentage of forested area – in comparison to the previous recorded year – aiming at including sanction mechanisms in case of missing the target marks.
- Implementing a threshold regarding CO₂ emissions per capita aiming at introducing a carbon tax in case of excessive CO₂ emissions breaking the threshold.
- Considering the compliance of Human rights as defined by the UN Declaration of Human Rights as basic requirement for concluding FTAs. The European Commission should underline this ambition by certain embargos on weapon trade, face recognition technology, etc. This also includes basic labour rights.

Sino-EU Trade

We agree with the EU's ambitions to obtain an EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) which would be a win-win situation for both actors. Yet, Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) are not defined as a geographical indicator and will not be protected. Furthermore, the subsidies to Chinese state-owned enterprises have risen and threatening free trade. We positively receive the signing of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) which shows China's willingness to commit to the protection of IPRs. But any Sino-EU FTA needs to take the Red Lines into account. We ask the Portuguese Council Presidency, the European Commission and the European Council to take the following three demands into account:

- Since the status quo favours China, we call upon the Portuguese Presidency to set a mid-2021 deadline to the EU-China talks. This will result in further negotiations and put an end to the unsustainable status quo.
- Also, the European Commission and the European Council must signal that a coordinated trade policy with the US towards China would be the next step if the current deal with China will be rejected.
- European trade is linked to our shared values. Considering the recent news about suspected human rights violations in China, the EU must demand an independent investigation on this issue.

A renewed Union for the Mediterranean

The current deadlock regarding the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) must be broken and negotiations should be resumed. Taking into consideration the focus on Africa of the Portuguese Council Presidency, we propose to re-model the UfM as an effective platform for cooperation with Mediterranean countries. We acknowledge the limited timeframe of the Presidency and the difficulties of implementation, still the process should be initiated in the upcoming months. The UfM is an excellent opportunity for more equal relations between North African and Arabic countries on the one hand and the EU on the other hand. The revitalization of the UfM contains synergies which exceed pure trade benefits. Eventually, a successful UfM can serve as a basis for a coherent EU-Africa strategy.

The purpose of the ideas above-mentioned is to ensure that the EU enhances its political weight in a global world. It is essential that the European values are represented in FTAs with third countries concluded by the European Commission. Furthermore, it must be ensured that the best deal possible is made, be it with China or with the Mediterranean region.



Since the world is currently shaped and threatened by the simultaneous rise of global challenges such as increased pressure on the international rules-based order and an accelerating climate crisis, the #EngagEUR Council Delegation for Foreign Policy urges the Portuguese Council Presidency to proactively prioritise the issues of peace, human rights, climate protection, development, and multilateralism.

Towards a comprehensive strategy with Africa

Considering the goals of the African Union's Agenda 2063 and of the European Commission's ambitions to develop a new comprehensive strategy with Africa, the Portuguese Council Presidency should prioritise two ideas to be accomplished under the EU-African Partnership within a 10-year program in Sub-Saharan Africa starting in January 2021:

- Enhancing and securing access to clean water in drought-affected areas through facilitating investment in infrastructures of seawater desalination and water-supply systems;
- Investing in research and flagship projects to analyse the impact of genetically modified seeds on increasing crop yield and regenerating the soil in face of desertification processes.

Strengthening Efficiency and Coherence of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)

The unanimity-based decision-making procedure within the CFSP restricts the ability to act effectively and prevents the European Union (EU) from adequately and timely responding to international events and crises and acting concertedly in the coherent promotion of its core values while leaving the EU vulnerable to divisive pressure by third countries. Therefore, based on the communication COM (2018) 647 Final introduced by the previous Commission, we suggest – in line with the provisions under Article 31 Treaty on European Union (TEU) – to introduce qualified majority voting (QMV) to Council decisions in the following areas of CFSP:

- EU positions on human rights in multilateral fora and bilateral relationships with third countries,
- EU reactions concerning violations of international law by third countries,
- Adoption and amendment of EU sanction regimes,
- Establishment and implementation of civilian Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions.

Re-establishing and Enhancing Mission Sophia

From 2015 until early 2020, Mission Sophia (EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia) helped to rescue tens of thousands of migrants in distress, while contributing to the reduction of life-threatening human trafficking and the enforcement of the United Nations-imposed weapons embargo on Libya. We call upon the EU Member States to re-establish Mission Sophia as well as to increase its operational strength, numbers of vessels, and personnel. Contributing to increased cooperation in the realm of CFSP, it allows the saving of thousands of lives who are currently relying on controversial actions of NGOs. Additionally, an enhanced mission allows the EU to end cooperation with the Libyan coastguard, which is repeatedly accused of human rights violations both at sea and on Libyan territory.

In order not to let the current plethora of serious international crises pass by inactively, we suggest advancing the CFSP both in its procedural efficiency and its substantial approach to sustainable development in Africa and humanitarian migration management in the Mediterranean.



In order to meet current and future challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the European Union (EU) needs to be more resilient than ever. In line with the Portuguese Council Presidency's goals, the #EngagEURCouncil Delegation for Resilience suggests policies to make the EU better prepared for future shocks, while strengthening citizens' confidence in its functioning and making it more digital and sustainable.

§ Transparent FuturEU – to ensure decent spending of EU recovery funds

Despite being of highest priority for a functioning democracy, corruption retains its grip in too many parts of the world, including the EU. While being a rallying cry for citizen action in recent years, there remains a significant "implementation gap" between anti-corruption rules and practice. We therefore strongly support the European Commission's proposal of 30 May 2018 for an EU Anti-Fraud Programme. Beyond the protection of the financial interests of the EU, we ask for greater transparency in the receipt of EU funds, since the quickly mobilised, enormous recovery funds are more likely than ever to be abused. We urge the Council of the EU, the European Parliament and the Commission to prioritise anti-corruption measures for the funds that will be disbursed through the new budget. To this end, we propose the establishment of a new mechanism, which would oversee the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and the recovery instrument "Next Generation EU" (NGEU) to counter corruption while sustaining transparency.

§ CIRCLE – Critical Infrastructure for a Resilient, Coordinated, and Long-term Europe

The EU has been required to be resilient on numerous occasions in the last decades: terrorism, financial crisis, migration crisis, and now, a pandemic. What is next? The climate crisis? Increased cyber-attacks? Currently, EU legislation considers energy and transport as the only essential systems providing vital economic and social functions and needing protection from natural and man-made shocks (*critical infrastructure*). Given new kinds of threats, we call on the European Commission to use its forthcoming proposal (leveraging its impact assessment this summer) to (i) broaden the 2008 Directive's critical infrastructure list, (ii) boost vulnerability reporting, early warning systems, and coordination, and (iii) articulate with other programs (e.g. EU Civil Protection Mechanism). The Portuguese Council Presidency's focus on migration, climate, and the economic recovery aligns with the short- and long-term impacts of this proposal. More than ever, it is time to square the **CIRCLE!**

§ Funding for Digital and Sustainable Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs)

Digital transformation is one of the key topics the Portuguese Presidency aims to take further to align with the forthcoming 2030 Digital Targets. But how can these be achieved in an economic crisis while being balanced with the EU's climate goals? As SMEs are the backbone of the European economy, building their resilience should be included to ensure a sustainable digital transformation. Despite 30 percent of the MFF and NGEU shall be allocated to sustainable investment fighting climate change, the budget is missing a specialised fund for sustainability-focused SMEs that operate in the digital economy. Therefore, and in order to encourage sustainable entrepreneurship during this crisis and to enable digital SMEs to expand their activities in the long term, we propose a **centralised sustainability fund for digital SMEs**. This dedicated fund for digital SMEs strengthening their sustainability features will scale up the EU's economic resilience and broaden its presence in this growing economy.

Portuguese Council Presidencies have a tradition of setting long-term visions for the EU. Pursuing resilient policies will not only improve the lives of EU citizens but contribute to the long-term development, the ability to act and the prosperity of the EU.



About #EngagEUrCouncil:

Youth exchange and youth participation in the Trio EU Council Presidency of Germany, Portugal & Slovenia



★ Young agenda-setters for Europe

Protests against climate change and attacks on the freedom of expression in the age of digitization, or the promotion of the EU project countering rising populism and nationalism – young EU citizens increasingly set the agenda with political demands that are relevant to the broad spectrum of society. In the framework of the project, young citizens from Germany, Slovenia, and Portugal are invited to jointly formulate political demands based on knowledge and information they gain during the project. At the occasion of key political events, participants have the unique opportunity to present their ideas to decision-makers of the Trio EU Council Presidency of Germany, Portugal, and Slovenia in 2020 and 2021, and to the public.

★ #EngagEUrCouncil: Youth participation in Virtual Think Tank

Europe-wide discussions in times of contact barriers, border controls and travel warnings? The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic have not passed on #EngagEUrCouncil. But the pandemic is just another reason to think about innovative European solutions based on knowledge. In 2020, #EngagEUrCouncil thus hosted a Virtual Think Tank, in which the young participants already developed ideas for the German and the Portuguese Council Presidencies through interactive debates and Virtual Labs.

★ Germany, Slovenia, and Portugal – an innovative triangle

The ongoing Trio EU Council Presidency is geographically, historically, and socio-economically highly diverse and is likely to induce multilayered, constructive and critical debates about EU policy. This will lead to the development of new (young) ideas for the Future of Europe in the framework of the #EngagEUrCouncil project to integrate a constructive and sustainable youth dimension into the Trio EU Council Presidency.

★ Set the agenda with youth demands based on information and knowledge

#EngagEUrCouncil is based on a holistic proven and tested youth participation concept which builds on three interlinked methodological components.

- #YoungCitizensFutureLabs that aim at sharing knowledge on the European Union and at identifying first demands.
- #YoungExpertsLabs that aim at deepening the content of the demands developed.
- #YouthIdeasPanel at TEPSA Pre-Presidency Conferences aimed at presenting the developed youth demands to political decision-makers.

These methodological components altogether establish a 6-month cycle of youth empowerment and agenda-setting. This cycle is implemented for the German, the Portuguese, and the Slovenian Presidency respectively.

★ Timetable of #EngagEU Council:

**Portugal:
07-12/2020**

**Germany:
03-06/2020**

**Slovenia:
01-06/2021**

**Follow-Up Evaluation:
07-12/2021**

★ **Project Term:** 1st January 2020 to 31st December 2021

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