



#EngagEUrCouncil

YOUTH IDEAS FOR EUROPE

Setting the Scene for the Slovenian EU Council Presidency

Future of Europe #climatechange #YoungExpertsLab
#Berlin #citizensparticipation #PPC #active #Portugal
Young Ideas Panel #EUinfluencer #Empowerment
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Youth Ideas for the Slovenian Council Presidency:

Responsible, inclusive and sustainable EU

Slovenia will start its six-month presidency of the Council of the European Union on July 1st, 2021 as the last member of the trio presidency together with Germany and Portugal. Many challenges are being faced by the EU to which a presidency can and should actively contribute. Additionally, Slovenia will be tasked to continue with the activities, started by the Portuguese and German presidencies. The COVID-19 pandemic is not yet over and recovery of the EU economy and society remains a continuous effort to which a significant effort of any presidency must be devoted. The European Green Deal is an ambitious programme for the member states where no time should be wasted in its implementation, not only on account of the fact that the EU has the ambition to lead in global actions to address this highly pertinent issue. The opening of the Conference on the Future of Europe is another ambitious project to be supported by the Council, where in particular the involvement of the youth is essential. The young citizens need and should have their say in what is to be their future!

In this respect, the #EngagEUrCouncil project and the ideas presented by its young members are especially relevant and important. The four areas they selected as priority themes reflect their high level of awareness of what the global, not only European problems are. Their reflections are focused on what is being debated at a number of different international fora, and their proposals include an innovative and creative approach, stressing in particular the sensitivity to fair, inclusive and sustainable solutions.

In close alliance with the priorities of the Slovenian presidency programme there are deliberations on the enlargement policy. The suggestion to involve more the civil society through programmes, which integrate young people at high schools and universities in building bridges among the countries is a welcome proposal to the more formal activities usually planned by the public officials. Also, the advocacy for a clearer, more transparent and realistic perspective for potential member states should be listened to, along with the need to improve the country reports by involving local civil society in their preparation.

The strong emphasis on responsible and ethical digitalisation reflects the sensitivity of the young people to potential discrimination of underrepresented groups in the EU that strive towards digitalisation. Their concern of a fair and inclusive approach in future algorithm programming being at risk needs to be taken on board by those designing activities in the wide field of promotion of digitalisation, especially their very specific proposals on establishing an institute focussing on non-discriminatory algorithm design and humane and responsible artificial intelligence. The ethical issues often get neglected when digital infrastructure is planned, so it is encouraging to see young people arguing for fair, inclusive, innovative and sustainable as well as ambitious and bold digitalisation.

The same level of active concern is expressed in the proposals how to address the climate change. If anyone is to feel the consequences of climate change, it is the youth, thus it can be expected that this complex

topic gets their constructive attention. Their proposals of what the focus should be in the area of carbon emission reduction, circular economy and agriculture deserve to be taken seriously. What is particularly remarkable is their recognition that a change in consumption patterns is inevitable, thus calling on all of us to contribute to saving the planet. Their belief that the EU should be the leader in sustainability puts a significant challenge in front of the EU policy makers.

A call for a European Health Union is a daring proposal in the area, which before COVID-19 was predominantly a national policy area of each individual member state. A more resilient healthcare system, based on solidarity and sharing of resources, knowledge and skill-sharing capacities would not only make the EU better prepared for potential future crisis, but contribute to the reduction of inequalities, both within the EU and globally.

The proposals by the youth have a strong common denominator: high level of empathy and social responsibility along with a belief in a European common future. This calls for a responsible and committed behaviour of policy makers in the presiding country, the Council of the European Union, the European Commission as well as the European Parliament to work towards the EU, based on principles of equality, justice and inclusiveness for all its citizens and beyond.

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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.

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Digitalization

Digitalization will continue to dominate our everyday lives. Other global actors have decided to leave the digital transformation to economic imperatives. However, the EU has pledged to be a forerunner of responsible and ethical digitalization in its Digital Strategy. In this spirit, the #EngagEU Council Digitalization Delegation calls upon the Slovenian Council Presidency to consider the following proposals as a concretisation of their priorities to ensure a fair, inclusive, innovative and sustainable digitalization.

Diversity in Algorithms

Algorithms are often biased. They are man-made and, thus, reflect human biases – in particular those of the programmer. These inherent prejudices make algorithms discriminate against minority groups. With respect to the Trio Presidency's programme to advance the digital transformation of Europe, we propose to take the following actions to ensure that algorithms are fair and inclusive:

- The establishment of a European Research Institute and Graduate Programme focussing on non-discriminatory algorithm design. Its research staff and graduates should predominantly come from formerly underrepresented social groups, such as women or ethnic minorities, who often fall victim to algorithm-based discrimination. This will help to make algorithm design more diverse in the long term. Research will further help to minimize discrimination in the future.
- The introduction of an ambitious European Quality Certificate for algorithms to guarantee their fairness.

Digital Sustainability and Innovation

Digital technologies are key accelerators to achieve the goals of the European Green Deal (EGD). To shape the digital transformation sustainably, we urge the European institutions to increase the funding for emerging green and digital startups in the EGD's Innovation Fund significantly, combining the two major challenges of our time simultaneously: climate change and digitalization. The additional funding should be financed through increased and more effective taxation of big, multinational companies in the digital sector. This will improve the EU's independence, its comparative position in green tech worldwide and will make it more innovative. The EU needs to become the forerunner of green tech as this will increase its economic strength and, thus, its power to promote its solutions and democratic values in the world.

Humane and Responsible AI, Worldwide

We welcome the EU's Artificial Intelligence Act (AIA) that promotes a safe and ethical use of AI and benefits the wellbeing of citizens. To strengthen the EU's strategic position in a globalised, tech-dominated world and to promote the ethical use of AI abroad, we encourage the Slovenian Council Presidency to set up provisions for capacity building abroad. Through sharing knowledge and best practices on safe and responsible AI, promoting relevant skills in technology and creating economic incentives the EU can establish an ethical digital infrastructure with relevant actors. The EU should actively seek economic and academic collaboration in the field of AI with third countries. This will ensure that the EU has a say in the world's digital transformation and that the rights and safety of its citizens are prioritised globally.

Digitalization needs to be fair, inclusive, innovative and sustainable. Our proposals contribute to the economic renewal of the EU based on a green and digital transition and to an improvement of the EU's strategic position in the world regarding economic progress and humane innovation. We ask you to be ambitious and bold. We need the EU to be fit for the future. We need your action.



Arguably the biggest crisis of the 21st century, climate change, affects every aspect of our lives, transcending national and European borders. To respond to the rapidly advancing climate change, the #EngagEU Council Climate Policy Delegation envisions an EU that leads by example and understands that solely collective action and fighting root causes, not only symptoms, will help tackle this all-encompassing systemic problem. Hence, we call the EU institutions and member states to act upon the following urgent propositions.

Reducing Carbon Emission

We welcome that the EU defined the goal of becoming climate-neutral by 2050 in its European Green Deal (EGD). To achieve this aim, it is imperative to significantly lower the carbon emissions of all member states. We ask the Slovenian Council Presidency to pave the way for a European Carbon Tax introduction and the harmonization of already existing Carbon Taxes of several member states – mainly covering the sectors currently not included in the EU Emissions Trading System. The EU needs also to take responsibility for and radically reduce its consumption-based emissions stemming from trade, as opposed to solely production-based emissions, and include them in the EGD.

Fostering Circular EUconomy

We strongly believe that sustained efforts and pace acceleration are needed to reach the vision of the EU as a carbon-neutral continent. To intensify efforts in this direction, we urge the EU institutions, building upon the Commission's New Circular Action Plan, to strengthen the focus on circular EUconomy through future-oriented system changes such as the introduction of a European recycling and deposit system. In addition to existing initiative through the EGD, increased investments in sustainable infrastructure and renewable energies are urgently needed. We need to re-innovate our economy and understand sustainability as our future path instead of just a trend.

Enabling Sustainable Agriculture and Biodiversity

Besides an optimization of agriculture and the enhancement of biodiversity, our current agriculture policies need to be reshaped. A change in food production and consumption patterns is essential and our oceans and forests value should be measured in more than solely their carbon sequestration value. Therefore, we ask the Council of the EU to investigate the development of sustainable packaging and novel ways of producing food such as vertical and urban farming. Crucially and long overdue, subsidies and investments in the dairy and meat industries need to decrease, while the potential of plant-based diets needs to be acknowledged and promoted. To fulfil its ambitions, the EU also needs to exercise greater control over species protection and catch limits on major sources of both livelihood and nutrition for millions of people, such as fish.

It is time for the EU to move beyond being a mere spectator to become the leader in sustainable development for the safety of our planet and the prosperity of the citizens, both now and for generations to come. We have the potential, we have the solutions, we are fully capable of achieving a sustainable future, but will you use this opportunity?



Enlargement Policy

The EU enlargement process has been stalled for several years now. Especially in countries of the Western Balkans, disillusionment in pro-European actors is spreading, endangering democratic reforms and pushing the accession candidates further away from the EU. The #EngagEUR Council Enlargement Policy Delegation urges the Slovenian Council Presidency to act as an advocate and mediator for a tangible accession prospect among governments and towards civil society, both in the accession countries and within the EU.

Strengthen civil society's participation in the accession process

Welcoming that the continuation of the accession process for the Western Balkans is a priority for the Slovenian Council Presidency, we strongly believe that exchange programmes for high school and university students as well as vocational trainees are highly beneficial for the citizens' support of the accession process. We therefore demand that the Council of the EU encourages the Commission to facilitate and set up secured funding for such programmes. Common European projects such as sports, theatre or festivals should also be considered in view of their potential contribution to connecting societies. We urge the European Parliament to voice its support in this matter, as the directly elected representatives have a close connection to their citizens. Furthermore, the Council of the EU, the Commission and Parliament should strive to include representatives of the Western Balkans' civil societies in the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE). The results of the CoFoE should be made accessible and concrete, with enough advertisement and an easy online registration.

Clear benchmarks for the accession process

In order to retain a positive momentum for the enlargement process, specific benchmarks for the accession process, as defined by the Copenhagen criteria and laid out in the chapters of the accession negotiations, should clearly address the progress achieved in specific chapters. We strongly believe that fulfilling the steps and understanding the progress towards accession made by candidates and EU institutions alike is of vital importance, as are honesty and transparency in communication. We therefore call upon the Slovenian Council Presidency to act as facilitator to ask the Commission and the General Affairs Council to use cohesive and reliable benchmarks for the accession process and to encourage EU member states to sensibly praise success or condemn drawbacks. We are convinced that clearly naming and referring to benchmarks in the evolution and growth of each candidate country, accompanied by a transparent and realistic perspective from either side, will pave the way for a more prosperous accession process.

Enhance the quality of country reports

We acknowledge the existing efforts to monitor the accession processes through country reports. However, they currently fail to adequately reflect the status of the accession process. So far, the reports have remained superficial, hindering an effective and positive accession process. We ask the Slovenian Council Presidency to address this by reserving more funding for the Commission for in-depth analysis in the reports and by including local civil society in candidate countries in writing the reports to guarantee a more nuanced and richer evaluation. Moreover, a comprehensive picture over the status of the accession process needs to include negative developments and setbacks as experienced and reported by civil society actors.

Our proposals aim to solve the deadlock of EU enlargement and create a plausible route for the accession of the Western Balkans. With membership in mind, the process should be feasible and provide a credible perspective, contributing significantly to the stability and prosperity of the region. To this end, we call for a stronger participation of civil society, clear and definitive benchmarks for accession and comprehensive country reports.



Health systems in Europe and worldwide are under mounting pressure. An acute shortage of healthcare workers strain to meet rising demand. Globally, the pandemic continues to highlight the gross inequalities of our political economy. At a time when collective action is desperately needed, many countries pursue inadequate, individual agendas. The #EngagEU Council Health Policy Delegation calls upon the EU to step up to the task we collectively face and to promote healthcare for all.

↗ Equitable Covid-19 Vaccine Distribution

The EU is leading the way in distributing existing vaccines. In addition to donations, we ask the Commission and the Council of the EU to push for a comprehensive plan to also boost global manufacturing capacity and effectively rollout vaccines through: Covid-19 related Intellectual Property waivers; sharing knowledge and resources; building manufacturing facilities in strategic locations and securing key supply chains; as well as developing regional competences by improving local infrastructures and coordinating distribution logistics with regional authorities in poorer regions such as the African Medical Regulatory Authorities.

↗ European Health Union

Healthcare for all requires both national and international governance. We urge the Slovenian Council Presidency to promote coordinated actions between member states. A resilient and response-able Health Union, supported by inspired EU investment, will require the continued development of early-warning systems; best-practice guidelines and collaborative research; as well as a more integrated European Health Insurance system supported by a secure EU-wide patient-controlled database. A healthy union also requires achieving agreements amongst willing member states and developing common positions on a range of issues. Adopting a Health in All Policies approach, we urge the Council of the EU to advance agreements to divest from carbon-intensive industries – to withdraw support for unsustainable practices – to strengthen existing arms controls and develop common oversight and enforcement mechanisms – and to uphold the right to health as a fundamental right for all.

↗ Health Workforce Conditions

To address workforce shortages, which are exacerbated by domestic and transnational migratory trends, we call on member states with the support of the EU institutions to take measures to:

- Collaboratively monitor migratory patterns to assess healthcare shortages, improve and reinforce working conditions and women's rights, particularly in poorer sending countries. This should also include the replacement of precarious self-employment contracts with regular employment contracts which uphold existing labour rights.
- Apply financial and career incentives to work in less attractive rural areas, to increase job flexibility between urban and rural centres by developing job rotation systems, and to further foster urban-rural exchange through dispersed training opportunities.

Intensified efforts are required to address the many challenges we face today. The EU cannot afford to leave poorer global communities behind. We cannot afford to ignore violations of international rule of law. And we cannot afford to leave healthcare workers on the frontlines without material and innovative support. The political decisions we make today must aim to develop resilient healthcare systems that work for all! Is the EU to become 'the Pharmacy of the World' or a Leader in the Struggle for Global Health?



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 and 2021, #EngagEUrCouncil thus hosted a Virtual Think Tank, in which the young participants already developed ideas for the German, the Portuguese and the Slovenian Council Presidencies through interactive debates and Virtual Labs.

★ Germany, Slovenia, and Portugal – an innovative triangle

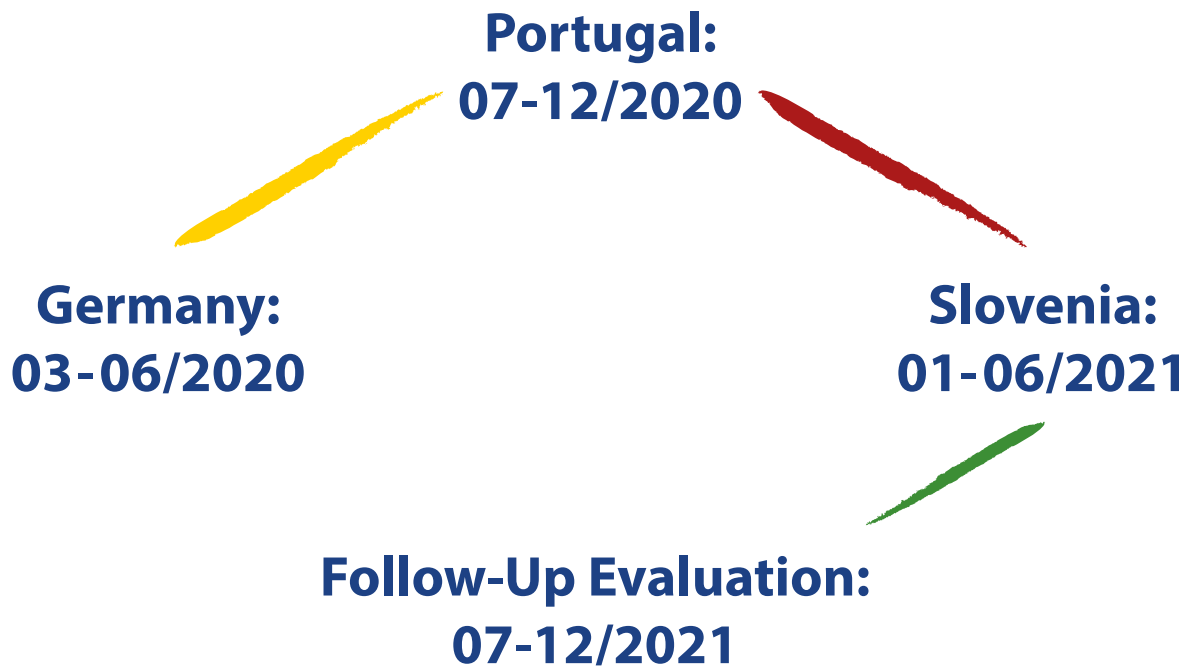
The ongoing Trio EU Council Presidency is geographically, historically, and socio-economically highly diverse and is likely to induce multilayered, constructive and critical debates about EU policy. This has led to the development of new (young) ideas for the Future of Europe in the framework of the #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.

- #YoungCitizens'FutureLabs 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.



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

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