

Key Takeaways from the German Pre-Presidency Conference “Shaping the Future of Europe” 25-26 June 2020

Session 1: Youth Ideas Panel: Shaping the Future of Europe

Structure of the Panel:

Opening Remarks by Dr. Werner Hoyer, President of the European Investment Bank, Luxembourg, President of the Institut für Europäische Politik, Berlin

Keynote by Axel DITTMANN, Director for EU Institutional Affairs, Brexit, EU Coordination, and EU2020 Presidency, Federal Foreign Office, Berlin

Youth ideas, 4 representatives of [#EngagEUrCouncil](#):

Simon HAPPERSBERGER, Asylum & Migration

Masa OCVIRK, Foreign Policy

Stephan NAUMANN, Climate Policy

João GOMES, Future of Europe

Moderation: Dr. Funda TEKIN, Director, Institut für Europäische Politik, Berlin; Member of the Board, Trans European Policy Studies Association, Brussels

Objective:

The first panel presented the [TEPSA recommendations](#) for the German EU Council Presidency and “[youth ideas](#)” from the [#EngagEUrCouncil](#) project, which represented the framework of the numerous conference’s discussions. After a keynote by Axel Dittmann, Director for EU Institutional Affairs, Brexit, EU Coordination, and EU2020 Presidency at the German Federal Foreign Office, four representatives of the [#EngagEUrCouncil](#) project presented their youth ideas along four topics: 1) asylum and migration, 2) foreign policy, 3) climate policy and 4) the future Europe.

The Panel’s Key Takeaways:

Crucial times are ahead for the German Council Presidency. The COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated current **deadlocks** in Europe, but it could also represent an opportunity to overcome those deadlocks.

In his keynote speech, Axel Dittmann clarified the **core objectives** of the German Presidency programme and highlighted six important points: Firstly, negotiations on the future relations between the EU and the United Kingdom, which will remain an important partner even after its withdrawal from the EU on 31st December 2020 (**Brexit**), are essential. Secondly, **social cohesion** in Europe must be strengthened through minimum wages, security systems and youth employment programmes. Thirdly, the German Council Presidency is working towards a concrete and fair proposal for a Common European Asylum System (**CEAS**) within the controversial asylum and migration policy. Fourthly, the opening of **enlargement negotiations**

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with Albania and Northern Macedonia, which have already been initiated by the Croatian Presidency, is of central importance. Fifthly, the EU must adopt a **united stance** towards China and strengthen its partnership with the African Union. Sixthly, the **conference on the future of Europe**, even if its start needed to be postponed due to the pandemic, should be able to play a key role in shaping the future of the EU. In principle, the German Council Presidency will strive to ensure that the EU emerges stronger from the crisis.

The first panel of the conference foresaw also the active participation of young students from the #EngagEUrCouncil project, who highlighted four main demands: **(1)** With regard to the **EU Asylum and Migration Policy**, the untenable situation in the Mediterranean and Greek refugee camps needs to be urgently addressed by the EU. Cases of asylum seekers should be handled individually and instead of criminalizing aid organisations, their expertise and knowledge should be included to complement member states' action. **(2)** With regard to its foreign policy, the EU should achieve greater strategic autonomy. The German Council Presidency should strengthen external action, including the Common Security and Defence Policy (**CSDP**), the Common Foreign and Security Policy (**CFSP**) and **Global Strategy frameworks** as well as continuing discussions also on difficult topics with partners like Turkey. **(3)** Decisive **climate action** in the EU is more important than ever. The Commission's recent Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) proposal could represent a vehicle towards a green recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic. **(4)** The **Conference on the Future of Europe**, which had to be postponed due to the pandemic, will play a key part in shaping the EU's future.

On the first point, the German Council Presidency will encourage the Commission to make a concrete fair proposal for the CEAS including close partnerships with countries of origin. On the second point, the discussants agreed that the EU should work towards a stronger role on the world stage. With regard to the third point, the German Presidency is determined not to lose focus on climate action and will reassert the EU's goal of carbon neutrality until 2050. Finally, with regard to the fourth demand, emphasising the participation of EU citizens in line with the conference on the future of Europe, the speakers of the panel agreed that the reconstruction of a closed and strong Europe is only possible through the active involvement of citizens of all EU member states.

Outlook:

The German Council Presidency will try to make its contribution in order for the EU to come stronger out of the crisis than before and to achieve the aforementioned objectives.

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Session 2: The EU's differentiated future after Brexit, InDivEu Panel

Structure of the Panel:

Axel DITTMANN, Director for EU Institutional Affairs, Brexit, EU Coordination, and EU2020 Presidency, Federal Foreign Office, Berlin

Prof. Dr. Brigid LAFFAN, Director, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute, Florence

Prof. Dr. Frank SCHIMMELFENNIG, Center for Comparative and international Studies, ETH Zurich

Dr. Funda TEKIN, Director, Institut für Europäische Politik, Berlin

Moderation: Dr. Christian FROMMELT, Director, Liechtenstein Institute, BERN

Objective:

After the 23 June 2016 referendum and the UK's decision to withdraw from the EU, Brexit became official on 31 January 2020. As a result, the UK and the EU have entered into complex negotiations of their future relationship, which have been overshadowed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Both sides seem to be willing to strive for an agreement in order to avoid, for instance, major economic distortions. However, although the risk of a “no deal” Brexit as in October 2019, which would have entailed the UK immediately leaving the EU with no agreement and no transition period, seemed to belong to the past, a new “no deal” 2.0 Brexit cannot be excluded. The current situation begs the question of what influence the COVID-19 pandemic has on the outcome of the Brexit negotiations and whether a “no deal” 2.0 Brexit is even more likely as of today. Moreover, will Brexit affect forms of differentiated integration in the EU? Differentiated integration corresponds to modalities of integration or cooperation that allow states (EU members and non-members) and sub-state entities to work together in non-homogeneous, flexible ways.

The Panel's Key Takeaways:

The panel highlighted three main points. First, Brexit represents an economic, legal *and* political challenge for the EU, which needs to be addressed in a tough timeframe. The EU however still benefits from an **asymmetric** negotiation setting. The COVID-19 crisis affects the timing of the negotiations and has weakened the British government in London, which shows now, conversely to the past, a clear desire for a **deal**. This implies that the UK will have to compromise more than the EU. In the face of numerous disagreements between the two parties, the EU must above all protect the Union and **membership** must matter. Brexit is a ‘lose-lose-situation’ and the open question remains how to mitigate losses and ensure that the losses of the EU are contained. It is further important to pursue a **dynamic capacity in the agreement**, given that the UK will not always be governed by hard Brexiteers. At the same time, the agreement cannot be fragmented and the establishment of a **single governance**

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mechanism will be essential in this regard. The EU's relations with **Northern Ireland** and **Scotland** will also need to change, given that citizens in the two regions voted against Brexit and in favour of EU membership but are taken out of the EU nevertheless.

Second, the **Political Declaration** although not a binding text represents a “guiding principle” and probably the only good basis for negotiations between the EU and the UK in order to achieve progress. However, the EU will **not** compromise on the integrity and functioning of the single market. Moreover, due to Brexit, **new alliances** might emerge within the EU between members. Hence, the EU will need to have a specific focus on key foreign policy issues in the future.

Third, although Brexit does **not** represent an actual “**gamechanger**” for the dynamics of internal or external differentiated integration in the EU, it will nevertheless have an influence on relations within the EU and future alliances regarding differentiated integration.

With regard to the **internal differentiation**, Brexit will have on the one side a quantitative effect and reverse the differentiation trend in integration by bringing back the level of differentiation in the EU to pre-Eastern enlargement levels. It will also have on the other side a qualitative effect on internal differentiation: Brexit will disrupt the European multi-tier structure by removing the UK from the outer circle of members. This might make the system more centripetal. Before Brexit, Great Britain was a “champion of differentiated integration”, closely followed by Denmark. However, it is not to be expected that **Denmark** or **Sweden** in particular will give greater preference to deeper integration simply because of the absence of Great Britain in the EU.

With regard to the link between Brexit and **external differentiated integration** with a minimal trade agreement at best, Brexit is unlikely to redefine external differentiated integration. Hence, at present, Brexit does **not** set a precedent for future forms of the EU's external differentiated integration. Ultimately, future UK-EU relations demand a **tailor-made** approach just like future EU-Turkey relations.

Outlook:

Although the EU might be profiting in the near future from the COVID-19 crisis, which will affect the timing of negotiations with the UK, finding a compromise will remain challenging. Moreover, Brexit will not be a “gamechanger” in view of differentiated integration.

Session 3: Parallel Roundtables

3.1 Migration and Asylum

Structure of the Roundtable:

Stephan MAYER, Parliamentary State Secretary to the Federal Minister of the Interior, Building and Community, Berlin

Prof. Dr. Jaap DE ZWAAN, Emeritus Professor, Erasmus University Rotterdam

Prof. Dr. Adriaan SCHOUT, Clingendael Netherlands Institute of International Relations / Radboud University, Nijmegen

Prof. Dr. Florian TRAUNER, Institute for European Studies, Vrije Universiteit, Brussels

Moderation: Dr. Vittoria MEISSNER, Institut für Europäische Politik, Berlin

Objective:

Whereas the COVID-19 pandemic and its health, economic and social consequences have become the main priority on the Presidency's agenda, migration and asylum related issues should not fall behind. The roundtable addressed three main questions. First, whether the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, which should have been published by the Commission at the end of June 2020, will deliver a migration and asylum policy that is acceptable to member states and, at the same time, fit for the challenges the EU is currently facing. Second, what could be a pragmatic approach to the presidency's effort of revising the CEAS. Third, how the unique Schengen system can be safeguarded and remain intact against various crises.

The Roundtable's Key Takeaways:

Due to the COVID-19 crisis, EU member states have been increasingly differing in how they receive asylum seekers and manage their borders. This threatens the common European asylum policy as well as the Schengen area. Migration issues need to be tackled through a comprehensive European dialogue as well as a best practice approach in order to fight the COVID-19 pandemic across the EU.

Against this backdrop, the German Presidency is planning **reforms** in the area of border management by strengthening the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (EBCG) **Frontex** and by improving **digital** migration management. Nonetheless, the complex issue of responsibility in the asylum and migration policy area seems to remain unaddressed. In case of a massive influx of migrants, it is the **collective responsibility** of the member states to provide for an adequate infrastructure and sufficient human capacity in the responsible member state.

The focus needs to be also set on the current border management system of the EU and its shortcomings. The current EU border system relies on both centralised EU agencies and decentralised national agencies. What is urgently needed, however, be it centralised or decentralised, is an **effective border management enforcement system**. Moreover, ever-

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recurring problems of the **Common European Asylum System (CEAS)** remain relevant. When it comes to the internal redistribution of asylum seekers, the unfairness of the Dublin system (the so called “Dublin lottery”) keeps on calling for an ambitious reform, which should bring about a **paradigm shift**. This paradigm shift could be brought about by avoiding decisions at member state level in shaping EU asylum policy, by ensuring fast and centralised EU decisions on asylum applications in EU hotspots and by creating incentives for municipalities and cities to receive asylum seekers. Slight amendments in current directives will not suffice to reform the CEAS.

Finally, there is a risk that the forthcoming EU Pact for Migration and Asylum will overly focus on the cooperation with countries of origin, thereby neglecting the internal dimension of EU asylum policy.

Outlook:

The German Presidency needs to primarily aim at fostering **political will** and focus on **cornerstone reforms** to lay the ground for a comprehensive reform later on. In addition to the EURODAC directive, there is a whole package of legislative proposals that need to be negotiated, including a reform of the European Asylum Support Office and the Return directive, which are both cornerstones of the CEAS.

3.2 Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy

Structure of the Roundtable:

Prof. Dr. Danijela JAĆIMOVIĆ, Faculty of Economics, University of Montenegro, Podgorica
Edgar GANSEN, Head of Division EU External Policies incl. EU-Enlargement, Federal Foreign Office, Berlin

Dr. Ilke TOYGÜR, Elcano Royal Institute, Madrid

Discussant: Prof. Dr. Giorgi KHISHTOVANI, Research Director, PMC Research Center, Tbilisi

Discussant: Dr. Yuriy YAKYMENKO, President, Razumkov Centre, Kyiv

Moderation: Dr. Katrin BÖTTGER, Director, Institut für Europäische Politik, Berlin

Objective:

During its term, the German Presidency will need to strengthen the EU’s special responsibility for the countries of the Western Balkans as well as of its southern and eastern neighbours. Only if the EU can effectively and visibly demonstrate its ability to act as well as its benefit in these regions, including in overcoming the COVID-19 pandemic and comprehensively strengthening resilient crisis prevention systems, will it be able to act as a credible actor on the global stage. Against this backdrop, the question arises to what extent the European Union can cope with the significant socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis in the Western Balkans, thus

ensuring stability in the neighbourhood. Moreover, how can the European Union continue the enlargement process with regard to the Western Balkans, if necessary, and deepen cooperation in the region? When looking toward East, the EU needs also to pay particular attention to the Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020 and to the joint commitment of building a common area of shared democracy, prosperity and stability. What could be done in the future to achieve this joint commitment?

The Roundtable's Key Takeaways:

The EU Enlargement Policy as well as the instruments of the Neighbourhood Policy are (despite some dysfunctional membership talks as in the case of Turkey) among the most effective **geopolitical tools** as well as a **geopolitical “must”** for the EU. The **Eastern Partnership (EaP)** is a key aspect of the EU's geopolitical orientation. Political conditionality is in this case closely linked to clear accession prospects of eventual membership for the countries of the EaP in the EU integration process as well as for countries in the **Western Balkans**. EU credibility accordingly requires clear criteria, strict conditionality, detailed benchmarks as well as a clear perspective on EU membership for candidate countries.

The EU has an overwhelming interest in stabilising the Western Balkan region and in realigning its borders. Despite this evident interest, **divergent discussions** about the accession process for instance of Albania and North Macedonia continue to take place within the EU, given that some EU member states, e.g. France and the Netherlands, are not in favour of using the EU enlargement process to stabilise these countries. Moreover, France wants to see a change in the current accession methodology before negotiations can be opened with prospective members.

A further open question is whether there will be an “**Eastern Partnership+**” in the near future for partner countries such as Georgia and Ukraine, in order to push for further rapprochement with the EU. At the same time, the functionality of the current partnership and the danger of losing individual states during the integration process seems to suggest that the status quo should be favoured.

There are many similarities as well as some differences between the two mentioned regions. The German Presidency will need to keep analysing the **different layers** concerning citizens, national elections, trade agreements and the rule of law in its neighbouring countries, which are all issues closely intertwined with processes at the international level.

The **EU-Turkey relations** represent a sui generis case. In this case, the connection between political conditionality and a clear accession perspective is breaking down and the accession negotiations with Turkey, which are correspondingly dysfunctional, have come to a standstill since June 2018. However, the challenges attached to these negotiations are still preferred to the option of an undefined strategic partnership.

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Outlook:

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in the partner countries and the possibilities of a joint pan-European recovery from the crisis will need also to be addressed in the nearer future.

3.3 European Green Deal

Structure of the Roundtable:

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Christian CALLIESS, LL.M. Eur, Free University Berlin

Sabine NALLINGER, Managing Director, Foundation 2° – German Businesses for Climate Protection, Berlin

Dr. Karsten SACH, Director-General, International and European Policy, Climate Policy, Federal Ministry for Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, Berlin

Prof. Dr. Gaby UMBACH, European University Institute, Florence

Moderation: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Johannes POLLAK, Webster Vienna Private University

Objective:

The German Council Presidency 2020 should pursue a sustainable and inclusive growth strategy that aims at strengthening the economy and preserving jobs as well as promote European social cohesion. To achieve these goals, it will be necessary to ensure that the transition to a sustainable economy is based on the European Green Deal and that the digital transformation plays a central role as well.

In this regard, many questions emerge as to the extent to which the economic recovery during and after the COVID-19 pandemic can be in line with the objectives of the European Green Deal. Moreover, does the crisis create scope for action and if so, can and should it be filled with the European Green Deal?

The Roundtable's Key Takeaways:

The achievement of a **green and sustainable future** needs to be a core task of the German Presidency. The European Green Deal should be at the heart of the **EU Recovery Package** and investments should be redirected accordingly. Economic recovery can and must be combined with the goal of achieving net zero emissions, nature conservation, a circular economy and sustainable digitalisation. However, opinions still differ as to how the measures could be implemented and which aspects should be prioritised

One possible step could be to **reformulate the strategies** of the European Green Deal, as they are still too abstract and therefore difficult to implement. In addition, a **dialogue with the industry** would also have to take place in order to implement ultimately feasible measures. Furthermore, **competitiveness** vis-à-vis third countries remains also relevant and should not be jeopardised. In this context, the financial aspect, in the form of support to the member states,

should not be underestimated in order to enable implementation of the measures, such as strengthening the **Just Transition Fund**, which is intended to support the 108 coal regions of the EU in their transition to a low-carbon economy. A further demand of the roundtable with regard to the European Green Deal was therefore to **close the gap** between promises made and actual results. One possibility to do so would be to integrate the deal into the **EU COVID-19 rescue package** by introducing **renewable energy projects**, especially wind and solar energy, and to give impetus to a **clean hydrogen economy** in Europe. In addition, the installation of one million charging points for electric vehicles as well as the promotion of rail travel should help to achieve **clean mobility and logistics** in Europe's cities and regions. To this end, it is essential to include the demands and recommendations of European citizens and in particular, those of the **younger generation** in order to send clear signals and ultimately halt climate change.

Outlook:

The COVID-19 crisis should be taken as an opportunity for a sustainable and *green* change in the EU.

Session 4: Must the EU 'learn to speak the language of power'?

Structure of the Panel:

Prof. Dr. Stefan FRÖHLICH, Institute of Political Science, University of Erlangen-Nuremberg

Sebastian GROTH, Director for Policy Planning, Federal Foreign Office, Berlin

Dr. Nicoletta PIROZZI, Istituto Affari Internazionali, Rome

Moderation: Prof. Dr. Senem AYDIN-DÜZGİT, Istanbul Policy Center, Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences, Sabanci University, Istanbul

Objective:

The EU has a major responsibility to help shape the global order in terms of greater international coordination and cooperation as well as more sustainability and solidarity. Which measures are necessary for a strong Europe that can assert its strategic autonomy, promote international standards as well as exercise its influence in the geopolitical competition with China and the United States? What happens if US President Trump is re-elected? In relation to these questions, what will the potential future of further defence cooperation in the EU be and how will Europe respond in the medium to long run to an increasingly assertive Russia in both the Eastern and the Southern neighbourhood? Similarly relevant is the economic aspect, which concerns again relations with China and which might take on new shapes in a post-COVID-19 world.

The Panel's Key Takeaways:

The core of the EU's strength resides first in its **economic power**, which is often underestimated. In fact, China, Russia, and the US are all bound to the EU through strong mutual economic dependence, which hampers their ability to thrive if the EU is struggling. This allows the EU to also fight for sustainability standards as well as social standards on the world stage. Secondly, the EU also possesses **strategic power** by continuously working on a strengthened CFSP and CSDP as well as its European Union Global Strategy. Thirdly, the EU's **normative power** has also become particularly strong in the context of the COVID-19 crisis. The EU seems to be quite successful in responding to the crisis through a renewed solidarity among its member states, if compared with other national models at the international level.

However, mere economic and normative power alone might not be enough when considering the current **challenges** faced by the EU. These challenges range from Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic to a threatened and weakened **multilateralism**, although this is the instrument currently needed most. With the US retrenching from its leadership position on the world stage and consequent **weakened transatlantic relations**, while China and Russia promote an aggressive foreign policy, the liberal order and multilateralism have come under **threat**. Additionally, the EU's relations with Turkey and the US, two of its formerly strongest allies, are increasingly deteriorating, a situation that has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis.

In order to strengthen the EU, a possible reform proposal could be the introduction of qualified majority voting (**QMV**) in the **CFSP**. Furthermore, in view of the mentioned overall goal existing projects like the **Permanent Structured Cooperation PESCO** should be also reinforced through budgetary increases under the new MFF.

With regard to China and the US specifically, the EU needs to be careful not to 'decouple' with either of them, while simultaneously actively working towards a balanced Brexit deal. With regard to the latter, it would be in both parties' best interest to continue cooperating in the area of European defence infrastructure, regardless of the negotiation's outcome.

Outlook:

While the EU speaks the 'language of power' better than some might expect, it is still in dire need of broadening its vocabulary and improving its 'fluency' in order to adapt to a more challenging global environment.

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Session 5: Parallel Roundtables

5.1 Institutional Reforms in Times of Crisis Management

Structure of the Roundtable:

Dr. Katrin AUDEL, Institute for Advanced Studies Vienna

Gaby BISCHOFF, Member of the European Parliament, Brussels

Jim CLOOS, Deputy Director-General of the General Secretariat of the
Council of the European Union, Brussels

Prof. Dr. Wolfgang WESSELS, Center for Studies in Turkey and the European Union,
University of Cologne

Moderation: Prof. Dr. Michael KAEDING, Department of Political Science, University of
Duisburg-Essen

Objective:

Only all Europeans together can shape the future of the European Union. This is one of the guiding principles behind the idea of a Conference on the Future of Europe initiated by the Commission. The Conference provides a forum for a broad debate on the EU's longer-term goals, but also on the lessons that the EU is learning from the COVID-19 pandemic. The Council, the Commission and the European Parliament should reach agreement on the structure and mandate of the conference as soon as possible and clarify how such a conference can take place under the unprecedented conditions caused by the pandemic. Besides the Council, the European Parliament and the European Commission, in the months to come new and considerable political challenges lie ahead also for the European Council, which remains a key institution. The question remains open about which institutions are relevant in crisis management.

The Roundtable's Key Takeaways:

The **Conference on the Future of Europe (COFE)** and the concomitant crisis could represent a **window of opportunity** for the EU to tackle the internal and external challenges that have emerged since the Lisbon Treaty.

During the COVID-19 crisis, national reflexes by member states that affected even major achievements of European integration such as the area of free movement were followed by a “**federalist moment**” as member states eventually tried to give a common response to the crisis. As a result, the challenges raised by the pandemic could give a **positive impetus** to the COFE.

In times of crisis, the EU should not primarily focus on institutional reforms, but rather on the capacity of existing institutions. During any crisis, all eyes are on the **executive** in order to

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achieve urgent **policy reforms**. The European Council thus still represents a major player in any kind of institutional matter, given its leading role enshrined in the Treaties.

The success of the COFE will mostly depend on two questions, namely (1) how the **agenda** will be set, e.g. whether treaty changes and amendments to the Electoral Act will be explicitly taken off the agenda or not, and (2) whether and how **citizens and civil society** are going to be involved. After the recent blow to the controversial *Spitzenkandidaten* process, the possibility of introducing **transnational lists** could foster first order European elections. The *Spitzenkandidatensystem* is worth saving, but it needs a clear basis in the Treaty and it will be the parties' task to increasingly mobilise citizens across the EU.

Outlook:

A joint Council position on the Conference on the Future of Europe will be an important step in allowing it to play a key part in shaping the EU's future.

5.2 European Social Cohesion and Social Security

Structure of the Roundtable:

Prof. Dr. Iain BEGG, European Institute, London School of Economics and Political Science

Dr. Hrvoje BUTKOVIĆ, Institute for Development and International Relations, Zagreb

Prof. Dr. Miriam HARTLAPP, Center for Comparative Politics of Germany and France, Free University, Berlin

Dr. Rolf SCHMACHTENBERG, State Secretary at the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Berlin

Moderation: Pola SCHNEEMELCHER, Economist, Paris

Objective:

Only by containing and fighting the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic sustainably, investing in the European economy as well as strengthening social cohesion, can the European Union and its member states overcome the crisis permanently and effectively. An important way to achieve this is by further consistently implementing the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR). These should include an EU framework for minimum wages and a strengthened role of social partners. What can be learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic and what concrete measures are needed to strengthen resilience, solidarity and social justice in Europe? In order to be able to implement an effective action plan for a recovery after the pandemic, how can the German Presidency step up its efforts to implement the principles of the EPSR?

The Roundtable's Key Takeaways:

The crisis has clearly placed a new focus on **social problems** offering new insights into the concrete measures needed to strengthen **stability, solidarity and social justice** in Europe. The situation of **migrant workers** has also been given the necessary priority during the crisis. The

border closures during the pandemic revealed the need to better protect the **social rights** of migrant workers in host countries. Among the policy responses to the COVID-19 crisis agreed or on the table, there are some, such as the Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (**SURE**) programme, which seem to address social cohesion. At the same time, it is not obvious how the instrument of the **Next Generation EU** will advance social cohesion.

The crisis could further represent a possible moment to implement the **European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR)** as a binding law and to strengthen solidarity between member states. One suggested way forward could be to incorporate the EPSR as an annex into the **Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union**, in the same way that the Charter of Fundamental Rights was incorporated. To achieve this goal, however, it is necessary that the member states hand over far-reaching competences to the EU and engage in lengthy as well as challenging Treaty negotiations.

A key task of the German Council Presidency will be the implementation of a **Europe-wide minimum wage**. It is important to establish uniform regulations in this area, as there are currently excessive differences between individual member states. Another important critical issue is that politicians keep prioritising the market over social aspects to recover the economy, instead of focusing on the latter as well.

Outlook:

The increased spending proposed at the EU level as a response to the COVID-19 crisis could represent a chance for turning the EPSR into a success story.

5.3 Youth Ideas

Structure of the Roundtable:

Students from:

#EngagEUrCouncil

University of Magdeburg

University of Passau

Moderation: Julia KLEIN, University of Magdeburg; Julian PLOTTKA, University of Passau; Jana SCHUBERT, Institut für Europäische Politik, Berlin

Objective:

Giving young European citizens a voice was an integral part of the German PPC organized by TEPSA and IEP. The roundtable gathered 30 young citizens from the Universities of Passau and Magdeburg as well as from the IEP's #EngagEUrCouncil project, who discussed policy ideas for the future of Europe along the "youth ideas" presented during the opening panel on the first day of the conference.

The Roundtable's Key Takeaways:

In the final roundtable with exclusive participation of the European youth, the four representatives of the #EngagEUrCouncil project, which connects young adults from Portugal, Slovenia, and Germany, discussed ideas for the German Council Presidency with other young EU citizens. By picking up the topics addressed during the conference's opening panel, the youth ideas were thus debated in a wider setting.

Participation, identity, and inclusion were important aspects of the debate. Participants agreed on the importance of implementing more participatory elements for European affairs while stressing the urgency for decision-makers to take the Conference on the Future of Europe seriously. The young citizens agreed that participation should not merely be a 'cosmetic tool' for European politics but represent instead an integral part of the Union. The Conference should consequently have the mandate to implement concrete policy demands into legislation. They also stressed the need for real representation and social inclusion to make the EU not a project of high-educated elites.

Discussions focused also on **QMV in the Foreign Affairs Council** in case of humanitarian questions such as human rights, rule of law, or democracy. While widely agreeing to this idea presented by the #EngagEUrCouncil rapporteurs, participants also pointed out possible disadvantages of changes to the Council's decision modes. For instance, the EU's external credibility could be diminished by majority voting given that consensual decision-making signals a united European voice.

Outlook:

The reconstruction of a closed and strong Europe is only possible through the active involvement of the citizens of all EU member states.

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