



Ideas for an innovative, fair and sustainable Europe after the pandemic

*Final report on the third project cycle
(April 2021 – June 2021)*

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Ambitious ideas for the Slovenian Presidency for an innovative, fair and sustainable Europe after the pandemic

After the successful completion of the second project cycle in November 2020, the #EngagEurCouncil team spent spring 2021 preparing for the third and final project cycle for the Slovenian Council Presidency starting on July 1, 2021. In doing so, the team was able to draw on relevant experience from the first two project cycles, the work in the Virtual Think Tank, as well as the evaluation that had already been started among the participants. Thus, in the third project cycle, the Virtual Think Tank focused even more on enabling an exchange of participants from Germany, Portugal and Slovenia beyond the content-related cooperation and discussions in the Virtual Think Tank. Closer communication between participants and the project team as well as the optional offer to participate in social digital activities after the Virtual Labs were received positively by the participants and had a beneficial effect in terms of more intense collaboration throughout the project cycle.

The Slovenian Council Presidency as the backdrop for the third project cycle of #EngagEurCouncil

The third project cycle focused – with regard to the interests of the Slovenian Council Presidency – on the working groups "Climate Policy", "EU Enlargement Policy", "Health Policy", and "Digitalization". A total of 24 young and enthusiastic people from Germany, Portugal and Slovenia came together to develop relevant and innovative ideas for the Slovenian Council Presidency in the four current policy areas from April 19, 2021 to May 30, 2021. To conclude, these ideas were presented at the Trans European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA) virtual Pre-Presidency Conference (PPC) on June 17, 2021.

The idea development was again implemented digitally due to the ongoing pandemic situation and the positive experiences from the first two project cycles. In four Virtual Labs, participants came together, exchanged ideas among themselves and with experts on the Slovenian Presidency and the selected policy areas. In order to offer participants a platform for discussion and coordination between the individual Virtual Labs as well as a source of information with prepared background dossiers, a Virtual Think Tank was set up in cooperation with planpolitik.

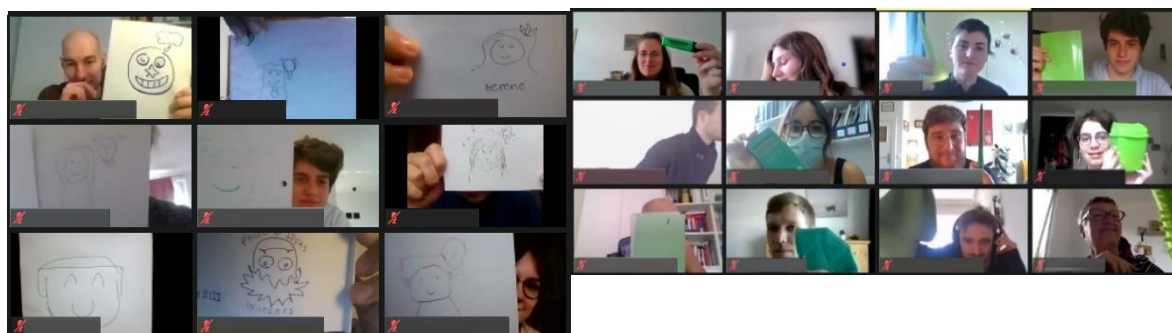
Project kick-off: Strong ideas and collaboration through solid foundations

The virtual kick-off meeting took place on April 19, 2021. After the introductory words of the director of the Institut für Europäische Politik (IEP), Dr. Funda Tekin, in which she mainly took stock of the previous German and Portuguese phases of the trio Presidency, Prof. Dr. Maja Bučar introduced our Slovenian project partner, Centre for International Relations (CIR), and opened up prospects on the planned conference to kick off the Slovenian Presidency. Project manager Jana Schubert used the remainder of the Virtual Lab to explain the goal and process of the project phases to the participants. Afterwards, the participants had the opportunity to get to know each other. In order to make the kick-off meeting as interactive as possible, the participants were, among other places, active on the Mural platform, where they shared their ideas and expectations for the #EngagEurCouncil project. Here, a first impression of the different experiences, interests and backgrounds of the participants emerged.



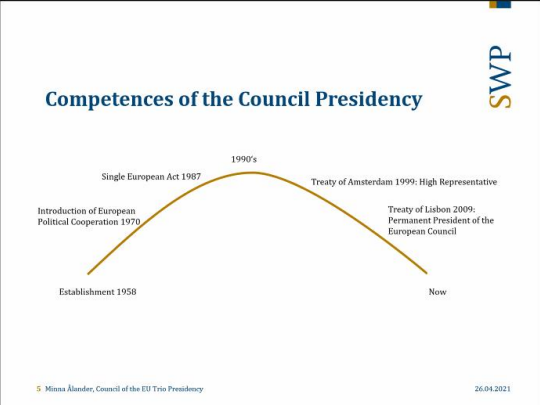
Finally, Tabea Böker from planpolitik gave a technical introduction to the Virtual Think Tank platform, which is at the core of the #EngagEURCouncil idea development process: Senaryon.


Virtual energizers and warm-up activities, such as the task to look for something green in the room or sketching their current mood on paper, broke up the intensive work phases during the Virtual Labs. The short sessions offered participants variety, breaks, and the opportunity to move around in front of the PC. They also structured the concentrated work phases of the long virtual meetings.



To make it easier for the participants to identify with the project, the project team sent the young "think tankers" a small welcome package to kick off the project cycle. In line with the current pandemic situation, this package contained a mouth-nose protection in #EngagEURCouncil look, but also helpful tools for virtual idea development in the form of glucose, pencils and a #YouthIdeas pad.

For the **second Virtual Lab** on April 26, 2021, discussions focused on the functioning of the presidency and the priorities of the Slovenian government. The project team was pleased to once again have Minna Ålander (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Berlin) as well as Prof. Dr. Maja Bučar (Centre for International Relations, Ljubljana) as the second guest on this topic, who addressed the specifics and priorities of the upcoming Slovenian Council Presidency.







Outlook on priorities of Slovenian Council Presidency





Maja Bučar,
Chair of international relations,
Centre of International Relations, Ljubljana

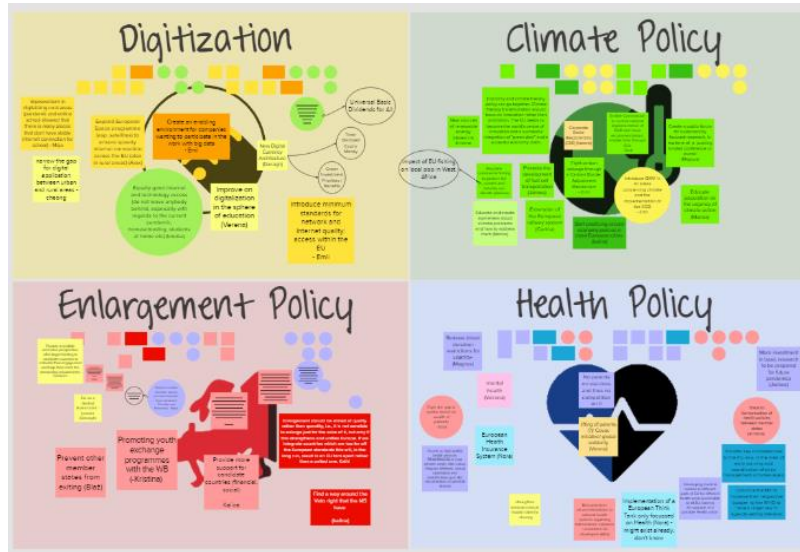


The four working groups - policy ideas for a sustainable EU after the pandemic

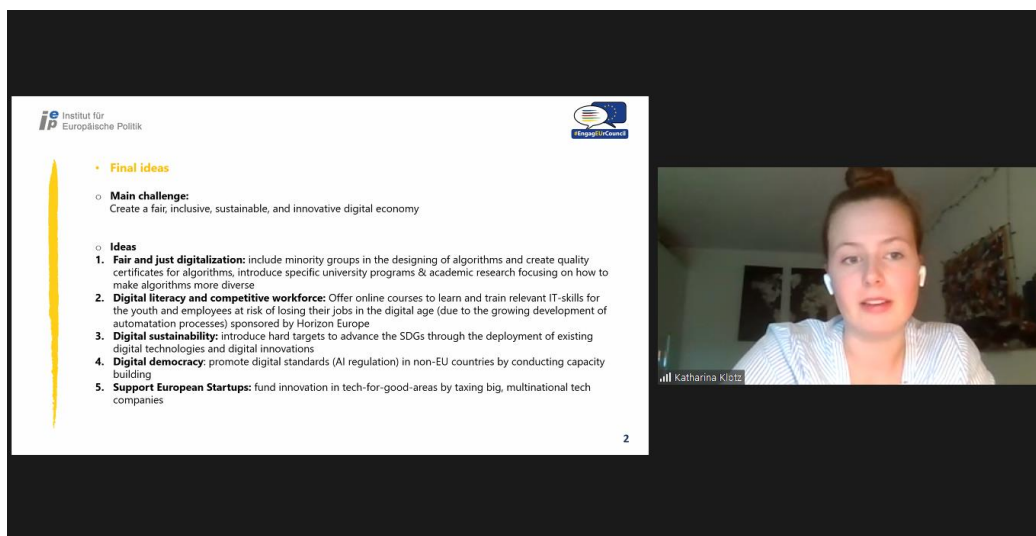
In the following project phase, the participants worked in the four working groups ("Climate Policy", "Health Policy", "Enlargement" and "Digitalization") in the Virtual Think Tank, depending on their interests.

The **third and longest Virtual Lab** followed on May 5, 2021, where the participants worked out and discussed their ideas for the Slovenian Council Presidency with experts on the individual policy areas in breakout sessions. Researcher Susan Bergner from the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik was available for the "Health Policy" group. Dr. Katrin Böttger, director at Institut für Europäische Politik, was recruited for the "Enlargement Policy" group. Kaan Sahin, Technology Fellow of the Planning Staff of the German Federal Foreign Office advised the "Digitalization" group and Simona Devresk, correspondent for the Slovenian newspaper

Svet Kapitla, discussed with the "Climate Policy" group. The group work was done via the virtual collaboration tool Mural.



The expert's explanations helped the participants to elaborate and concretize their ideas in virtual small groups and subsequent presentations in the plenary session.

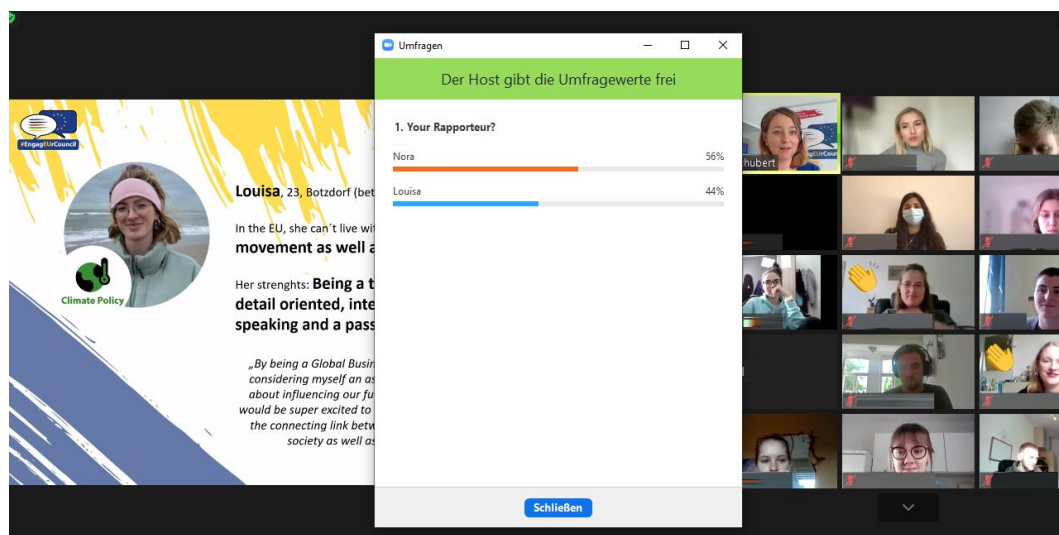


The image is a screenshot of a virtual meeting. On the left, a presentation slide is visible, titled 'Final ideas' and 'Main challenge: Create a fair, inclusive, sustainable, and innovative digital economy'. The slide lists five ideas: 1. Fair and just digitalization, 2. Digital literacy and competitive workforce, 3. Digital sustainability, 4. Digital democracy, and 5. Support European Startups. On the right, a video feed shows a participant, Katharina Klotz, speaking.

Participants were then given two weeks to finalize their ideas from the Virtual Think Tank in working groups and vote in plenary on the best and most potentially influential ideas.

For the final polish, the **fourth and last Virtual Lab**, a Writing Lab, took place on May 19, 2021. Participants were able to decide in groups whether the ideas, that were most worked and commented upon in the Virtual Think Tank, should be included in the final document. The participants also developed initial draft texts for the written concretization of the ideas, which were then presented and discussed in the plenary session.

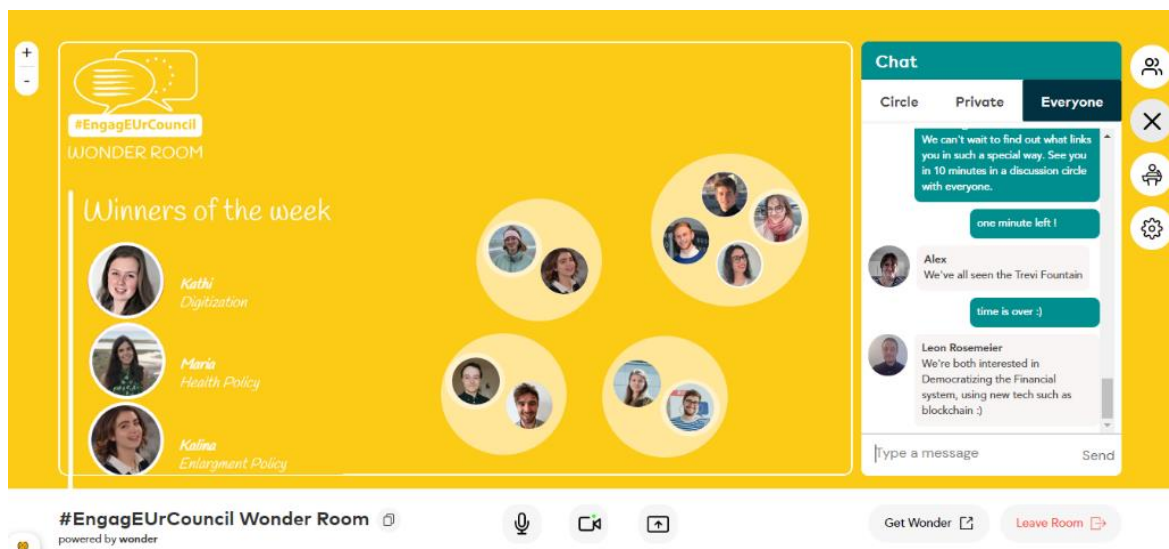
Also, four rapporteurs were chosen from among the participants, who would present the developed ideas for each working group at the PPC on June 17, 2021. For each group, at least two candidates had stood for election and briefly shared their motivation. The group showed great willingness to take on the task of the presentation and thus assume responsibility for what they had created together. The election could then be carried out with the survey tool of the conference platform.



In the following week, the participants succeeded in further specifying and finalizing the ideas by May 31, 2021. The newly elected rapporteurs acted as contact persons for the editorial processing of the ideas up to the final layout and were in close contact with the project team.

Participant retention and increased exchange: new optional add-ons:

In order to provide the participants with a further platform for getting to know each other better and for an informal exchange of ideas, the Virtual Labs were extended to include optional meeting opportunities in the third project cycle. These meetings were organised on the Wonder platform and the assistants of the #EngagEURCouncil project enlivened this meeting place with interactive and social games. For example, a "Speed Dating Challenge", with the goal of having as many participants meet as possible, a virtual "Pub Quiz" and other virtual games that focused on shared experiences among participants took place. Moreover, the participants were given the opportunity to exchange ideas and get to know each other in a relaxed atmosphere. The offer was received with a lot of positive feedback from the participants. As the project progressed, the Wonder platform was freely available to participants around the clock to provide their own virtual space outside of the meetings scheduled during the project.



Conclusion of the project cycle and presentation of ideas at the Pre-Presidency Conference

The third project cycle culminated and concluded with the Slovenian Pre-Presidency Conference on June 17 and 18, 2021. The conference, organized by CIR in cooperation with TEPSA, allowed the elected #EngagEURCouncil rapporteurs to convincingly present their elaborated ideas to high-level decision-makers in a virtual panel discussion.

Louisa Mandt ("Climate Policy") called on the participants of the PPC and the representatives of the Slovenian Council Presidency to intensify their efforts to drastically reduce the EU's carbon dioxide emissions and to become climate neutral by 2050. A European carbon tax and investment in circular economic cycles are concrete starting points for this, she said. Furthermore, food production and consumption should be given more attention, especially the reduction of meat-based diets and the production and promotion of sustainable packaging. Afterwards, Katharina Klotz ("Digitalization") formulated the demand to implement the digital transformation in the EU under the aspects of inclusion, innovation, and sustainability. For the group, this includes research on and development of non-discriminatory algorithms as well as the establishment of global exchange and training opportunities on responsible and ethical development of artificial intelligence. Furthermore, the group proposed to support digital start-ups with the Innovation Fund of the European Green Deal in order to combine the challenge of a digital with a sustainable transformation of the EU.



Climate Policy

-  Reducing Carbon Emission
-  Fostering Circular EUconomy
-  Enabling Sustainable Agriculture and Biodiversity



Digitalization

-  Diversity in Algorithms
-  Digital Sustainability and Innovation
-  Humane and Responsible Artificial Intelligence (AI), Worldwide

Kalina Dukovska ("EU Enlargement") appealed to the Slovenian Council Presidency with regard to the stalled enlargement process of the countries of the Western Balkans to act as an advocate and mediator to get the process going again. It would be necessary to involve civil society organisations more closely and to further promote civil exchange programmes, for example in sport or culture, between accession and member societies. Likewise, the accession process and the criteria to be achieved should be made transparent and comprehensible in benchmarks and improved country reports. Finally, Darragh Power ("Health Policy") presented the proposal of a resilient European Health Union, following a "Health in All" approach, which takes health as a human right seriously. Furthermore, the working conditions in the health sector, which are characterized by high labour migration and in which especially women suffer from precarious working conditions, should be improved.



The ideas developed in the third project cycle show once again that digital collaboration involving interactive formats makes constructive and very successful idea development possible. Due to the experiences of the project team from the first two project cycles, the engagement of all participants of the #EngagEURCouncil project in the Virtual Think Tank and the Virtual Labs could be further improved. Especially the introduction of the informal exchange formats after the Virtual Labs contributed to the participants' perception of themselves as a group, showing a high degree of responsibility for their work, also in the editing process of the final ideas. For comparable networking projects, this once again underlines the importance of providing sufficient space and time for interpersonal exchange, getting to know each other, and building mutual trust. The level of networking achieved in the third project cycle stands out particularly from the previous course of the project and led to the participants shaping their idea development process even more strongly and committedly under guidance. The concrete and ambitious Youth Ideas for the Slovenian Council Presidency are the result and expression of this intensive collaboration process.

In the last project phase until the end of 2021, the project as a whole will be evaluated, and the networking and dissemination of the results will be promoted. In the best-case scenario, but taking the current pandemic situation into account, a non-virtual meeting is planned, at which the networking of participants from all three project cycles should once again strengthen the debate on the future of the EU as well as the impact of the project not only among themselves, but also in the exchange with the outside world.

The project "#EngagEURCouncil: Youth exchange and youth participation" is funded by Stiftung Mercator. The project is implemented by IEP in close cooperation with Instituto Português de Relações Internacionais, Lisbon and the Centre of International Relations, Ljubljana. The project partners also cooperate with the Trans European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA) in order to ensure a Europe-wide coverage of the project and its activities.