



UNIVERSITÉ  
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# **Debates on the Future of Europe Débats sur l'Avenir de l'Europe**

**IEE-ULB POL-CoE**

**Final Report  
Academic Year 2022-2023**

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# Debates on the Future of Europe – Foreword

For the third consecutive year, the Institute for European Studies (IEE) of the Free University of Brussels (ULB) and the Department of Political Studies and European Governance (POL) of the College of Europe organised a series of debates on the future of Europe.

The debate is organised by a joint committee of students, with the support of the academic teams from both partner institutions. Throughout the year, 25 students from each institution come together in thematic groups, linked in 2022-2023 to the Conference on the Future of Europe.

This year, the student coordinators were Sami Chauvet, Ludovica Formicola (from the College of Europe), Mónica Ivanova Marinova, and Clara Vecino Prieto (from ULB).

For this third edition, a first meeting was held in December at the College of Europe in Bruges to allow students from each institution to meet, agree on the organisational details, and begin working in groups on the selected themes. Throughout the year the students carried out their research jointly and drafted policy recommendations. The topics addressed in this year's edition were the following:

1. Civic Participation and Democracy
2. Migration and Human Rights
3. Defence and Security
4. Climate, Environment and Health
5. Economic Resilience, Digital Transformation and Welfare

The second meeting and the Debate on the Future of Europe took place in Brussels at the end of the academic year, on 20 June, to finalise and present the proposals. The students engaged in a debate with high-level experts, namely:

- Prof. Alberto Alemanno (Professor at HEC Paris and College of Europe, cofounder of The Good Lobby)
- Dr. Juliette Dupont (Research fellow at the Initiative de recherche sur l'Immigration, Concordia University, Canada)
- Dr. Constantinos Hadjisavvas (Project Manager leading Climate Security and Energy at the European Defence Agency)
- MEP Philippe Lamberts (Member of the European Parliament, Greens/EFA)
- Prof. Amandine Crespy (Professor at ULB and College of Europe; Deputy Director of the Centre d'Étude de la Vie Politique CEVIPOL)

The policy recommendations were developed further based on the feedback received and collected in this booklet. The work of the participants can be found in the following pages of this report and will be disseminated on various platforms.

# Policy Recommendations by Working Group on Civic Participation and Democracy

*Working Group Members: Ludovica Formicola (facilitator), Miguel Rocha Medeiros, Martina Rubino (facilitator), Clara Vecino Prieto, Marta Volpe*

Our group decided to focus on European Democracy and specifically on civic participation, because we realised these topics are those where we feel mostly interested in giving our points of view and recommendations.

After a brainstorming concerning the broader topics of European Democracy, Rule of Law and Youth Participation we identified a series of subtopics:

- **European Democracy:** integrating civic education in school curricula; European elections; interinstitutional agreements and the European Parliament's right of initiative; reform of the composition of the Economic and Social Committee;
- **Rule of Law:** media pluralism; transparency within EU institutions and on budget; conditionality rules for EU funds; veto powers in the Council;
- **Youth Participation:** ECIs Reform and e-participation tools; impact assessment & public consultation; formalizing youth participation in the decision-making processes.

According to our interests, preferences as well as area of expertise we decided to focus on three specific topics: **European Citizens' Initiatives**, **European Elections** and finally on **Impact assessment** for policy development. The *fil rouge* connecting these three topics and the main goal of our recommendations is to **put citizens at the center of the agenda-setting and policy formulation** processes.

## European Citizens' Initiative Reform

*The ECI has been in place since 2012. It is the first-ever example of a participatory democracy instrument relying on the cross-border mobilization of citizens, and that aims at reforming the relations between EU institutions and citizens. No similar mechanism exists in the international arena. For initiatives to be successful, organizers must collect over one million signatures from at least seven EU Member States. So far, out of one-hundred registered ECIs only nine of them have reached the threshold. The majority of ECI initiators are usually between 21 and 30 years old, showing that this e-participation tool is most engaging for younger generations. What is concerning is that the populations of only two EU countries, Lithuania and Estonia, believe that taking part in an ECI is one of the most effective ways to have the voice of EU citizens heard within European institutions (European Citizens' Initiative Forum, 2021). Being the first digital supranational participatory democracy instrument ever developed by the EU, the functioning and effectiveness of the ECI have been assessed throughout the past decade, leading to important updates. Nevertheless, some inherent*

pitfalls, which significantly limit the ECI's performance, are still evident to date. The issues identified include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Collecting at least one million signatures from seven EU countries, among other requirements, is a major challenge for ECI organisers. Citizens' awareness of ECIs is limited; this was also stated in the "Report on the implementation of the Regulations on the European citizens' initiative" (A9-0182/2023)<sup>1</sup> by MEP Loránt Vincze (EPP) for the European Parliament's Committee on Constitutional Affairs (AFCO): "the lack of awareness [...] limits the ability of organisers to gather one million signatures";
- Voting age limits exclude Member States' population under 18 from signing initiatives, except in Austria, Belgium, and Malta where the minimum age is now 16 and in Greece is 17;
- ECIs produce limited debate and impact, even when successful. The implementation status of successful ECIs into EU legislation is unclear. The European Commission is widely criticised for not providing sufficient follow-up, despite this is not being a binding requirement: this further discourages organisers who do not see a real impact, even when their ECI meets the requirements;
- Conducting ECIs is not cost-effective for organisers due to burdensome financial reporting requirements. EU institutions do not support ECI financially and only Germany, France, Austria, and Slovenia have implemented financial support for ECIs at the national level. Indeed, in the above-mentioned AFCO Report, it is highlighted that "organising an ECI is a demanding and costly process; [...] it is very difficult for individual citizens to manage ECIs without being supported by strong associations"
- The acceptance of e-ID verification systems to sign ECIs can vary among countries: only 20 out of 27 Member States have implemented such systems;
- There is a heated debate on whether the ECI should keep its individual signature collection system moderated by the European Commission (as the current one) or replace it with a decentralised system. ECI organisers report the decentralised collection system provides them with the necessary flexibility and more adaptability to the various campaigns conducted at national level; on the other hand, the Commission argues a centralised system allows higher standards for data protection and fraud prevention.

#### **To achieve this:**

- We recommend building on the successful experience of the **Conference on the Future of Europe**, we recommend the European Commission, in line with the AFCO Committee's request, to establish **permanent Citizen's Panels based** on the most **popular ECI topics**. The Panels' topics shall be reviewed on a regular basis every few years without discriminating among ECIs that are successful or not.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2023-0182\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2023-0182_EN.html)

- We encourage the European Parliament to endorse relevant ECIs that do not reach the one million signature threshold, taking into account that ECIs' main goal is agenda-setting. Involving the relevant committees in feedback sessions, discussions and debates helps raise the profile of ECIs within a parliamentary context and fosters dialogue. We also recommend the European Parliament to hold debates on specific initiatives and adopt resolutions expressing its stance or recommendations to further promote ECIs' visibility and impact. We strongly believe that the European Parliament, as the representative body of the citizens, shall pursue topics that citizens advocate through ECIs.
- Following the example of Austria, Estonia, and Malta we recommend lowering the minimum age for signing ECIs to 16 in all EU countries to further empower young generations and harmonise access to participatory democracy tools at European level.
- We recommend the European Commission to create an independent ECI fund to support registered initiatives and develop a mechanism for budget allocation under the scrutiny of the European Parliament.
- We recommend all EU countries to implement **e-ID verification systems** to simplify and harmonise signature verification systems and requirements.
- We recommend the European Commission to **launch a media campaign in all EU Member States** to raise awareness on the ECI and share basic information on signature collection and registration requirements. We support the launch of the *ECI educational toolkit* for high schoolers by the European Commission; however, we suggest to broaden the scope of the initiative to target other age groups who are less likely to launch an ECI based on the data<sup>2</sup> provided by the ECI Forum (May 2023).
- We recommend the ECI shall update to a **decentralised signature collection system** to allow organisers to track the initiative's progress in-real time and adjust their strategy to reach specific target groups.

## European Elections

*The European elections are still the main way European citizens can express their voice and directly contribute to representative democracy. European citizens are called to provide legitimacy to the European Institutions by electing their representatives in the European Parliament. These elections should have a more European character, for not resulting again in a second-order national election and they should be regulated at the European level to result in a Parliament that reflects the composition of European society. We consider necessary to continue pursue the discussion on the recast of the 1976 Electoral Act and push it for an ambitious reform.*

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<sup>2</sup> Infographic on European Citizens' Initiative (Data & Figures). Available at: [https://europa.eu/citizens-initiative-forum/sites/default/files/2023-06/ECI-Forum\\_Infographic\\_%20May%202023.pdf](https://europa.eu/citizens-initiative-forum/sites/default/files/2023-06/ECI-Forum_Infographic_%20May%202023.pdf)

- *Equal electoral rights across Europe: Every Member State has some restrictions on the minimum age required to vote and to stand as candidates at European elections. However, these requirements vary between Member States. Concerning voting age, while most Member States require citizens to be 18 or older in order to vote, this age is set at 16 in Austria, Germany and Malta, and 17 in Greece. In Belgium, EU citizens can, following a recent change, vote in European elections from the age of 16.<sup>3</sup> Concerning the minimum age to stand as candidate, the differences are even greater as fourteen Member States require citizens to be at least 18, ten Member States require citizens to be at least 21 to stand, Romania requires a minimum age of 23 and Italy and Greece require citizens to be at least 25 to stand as candidates for European elections.<sup>4</sup> In order to increase the European character of the European elections, to create a sense of fairness and to improve participation among young citizens, rules on the European elections should be harmonized. The right to vote and to stand as a candidate for the European elections should not depend on which Member State you live in and more youth participation should be encouraged.*
- *More MEPs, better representation: The Treaties allow for a maximum of 751 Members of the European Parliament. After Brexit, 27 of the 73 seats from the UK were distributed among Member States. This allowed for to redress underrepresentation of some Member States achieving a better representation of citizens in the EP while following the principle of degressive proportionality. 46 possible seats remain empty, being kept in reserve for potential future enlargements. This can work for enlargements regarding smaller countries, but if a bigger country were to join the EU, the seats allocated to each Member State would need to be adapted. (Poland has 52 MEPs, Ukraine has a bigger population, the 46 “empty” seats would not be enough)*

**To achieve this:**

- We support Recommendation No. 38.3 from the Report on the Final Outcome of the Conference on the Future of Europe suggesting to “amend EU electoral law to harmonise electoral conditions (voting age, election date, requirements for electoral districts, candidates, political parties and their financing) for the European Parliament elections, as well as moving towards voting for Union-wide lists, or ‘transnational lists’, with candidates from multiple Member States, having taken into account the views expressed among citizens across the EU Member States on this issue”<sup>5</sup>.
- We recommend the minimum age to vote in the European elections to be harmonised at the European level and lowered to 16.
- We recommend the minimum age to stand as candidates at European elections to be set at 18 and harmonised at the European level.

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS\\_ATA\(2023\)749767](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_ATA(2023)749767)

<sup>4</sup>

<http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2017/mapping-minimum-age-requirements-concerning-rights-child-eu/standing-candidate>

<sup>5</sup> <https://futureu.europa.eu/en/pages/reporting?locale=en>

- We recommend the 751 possible seats of MEPs to be filled in order to reduce inequalities in the apportionment of seats regarding the population of each Member State, while following the degressive proportionality principle.

## Impact Assessment Reform

*Under the Better Regulation public consultation has become an obligation for the European Commission. Specifically, impact assessment is a systematic and evidence-based tool used by the European Commission to evaluate the best policy options to tackle an issue, taking into account the viewpoints of the major stakeholders and the analysis of potential consequences at economic, social and environmental level. The ultimate goal is to provide objective and informed information to support informed policy decisions and contribute to the development of effective and sustainable policies in the context of the European Union. Critics of impact assessments raise several concerns regarding their limitations and potential shortcomings.*

- *Lack of Independence: critics argued that the civic participation in the impact assessments could lack independence since they are conducted by the European Commission itself, which is also responsible for proposing the legislation. Hence, there is the risk that it could lead to a biased assessment favoring the Commission's pre-determined policy goals.*
- *Inadequate Data and Analysis: critics argue that the quality and availability of data used in assessments may be insufficient or biased. They claim that assessments may rely on limited data sources, fail to consider alternative perspectives, or overlook crucial factors, leading to incomplete or inaccurate analyses.*
- *Ineffective Stakeholder Engagement: While stakeholder engagement is an essential component of impact assessments, critics argue that the process often lacks meaningful participation. They claim that stakeholders, especially citizens, may not have adequate time or resources to provide meaningful input, resulting in assessments that do not reflect a diverse range of perspectives. Moreover, the opinions of the youth and minorities are often lacking in consultations for impact assessments. The result is an unequal access to the European Commission services.*
- *Limited Influence on Decision-Making: Critics raise concerns that impact assessments may not have a significant impact on actual decision-making processes. They argue that assessments may be disregarded or selectively used to support pre-determined policy choices, thereby undermining the purpose of conducting them.*

*Based on the considerations above, we believe impact assessments should focus more strongly on the social impacts of policies, including the creation of Gender and Youth indicators, in order to improve the quality of the analysis, addressing the challenges that the European Commission's decision-making is facing.*

**To achieve this:**



- Early and continuous engagement: we recommend to ensure that relevant stakeholders, such as civil society organisations, businesses and affected minorities communities, are involved from the earliest stages of the impact assessment process. Their input should be solicited and taken into account throughout the process, allowing for a more complete understanding of potential impacts of the policies proposed.
- Accessible information: we recommend to provide clear, concise and easily accessible information on proposed policies and their potential impacts. Make impact assessment reports, data and methodologies available to the public in a user-friendly format. This will facilitate informed participation and enable stakeholders to contribute meaningfully to the process.
- Gender and Youth indicators: we recommend the European Commission to include 'gender equality' and 'impact on the youth' as an indicator to evaluate the impact of a policy scenario. Whereas negative impacts are detected, the Commission should commit to developing mitigating measures to compensate for those effects. This will improve the quality of the analysis, addressing the needs and challenges in the European Commission's policy decision-making.

# **Policy Recommendations by the Working Group on Migration and Human Rights**

*Working Group Members: Valia Kakarouka (facilitator), Laura Nolasco Espino (facilitator), Monica Ivanova, Sara Felix, Louise Everarts, Eva Stradova, Valentin Parys, Nicola Sacco*

## **Introduction**

The topic on Migration and Human Rights encompasses several perspectives, questions and problems. Aiming to tackle emergent questions and situations that still lack harmonised and sustainable solutions, we decided to analyse three different topics that reflect this. The first is the rise of extreme parties which we consider that reflects what has been taking place in Member States (MSs) concerning the instrumentalisation of disinformation, mainly on migrants, to be used for the rise of extreme parties and how worrying it is to the protection of migrants in the MSs and Europe. Following the topic of protection of human rights, we also focus on the linguistic minorities issue since this topic has not been properly addressed due to the lack of tools. Moreover, this topic is highly relevant and it is currently under a possible backlash. Finally we will explore and recommend solutions for the difference of treatment among migrants in the European Union (EU) based on their country of origin. We seek to demonstrate that the desirable solution would be to aim for equal treatment for migrants, independently if they arrive from Ukraine or Syria if both situations require EU's support.

## **The Rise of Extreme Parties and the Instrumentalisation of Disinformation**

Throughout the decades, Europe confronted various crises of different nature, ranging from the 2009 sovereign-debt crisis and the 2015 migration crisis to the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic and to the most recent Russian brutal invasion in Ukraine in February 2022. Albeit their different basis, all these crises share a common characteristic: the progressive emergence and the dominance of extreme right-wing parties across Europe.

The crisis led to the rise of racist ideological discourse based on the negative connotation of migrants while generating a positive self-representation, in this case, Europeans. This "us-them" dichotomy is reflected in the discourse through metaphors, pejorative descriptions, or even using phrases such as "I am not a racist, but..." as a way of justification and reduction of responsibility from the politicians' side. Likewise, the creation of this discourse led by extreme right-wing parties is constructed through the use

of stereotypes and topics such as “illegal immigration”, problems of cultural integration, violence, drugs, economic imbalance, etc. (Van Dijk, 2006). In the political arena, the debates conducted by the extreme right focus on "illegal immigration". This discourse has a strong component of nationalist glorification while presenting migrants as a threat to the welfare state and even as an economic burden (Van Dijk, 2006). Within these negative messages framed as hate speech, far-right parties attempt to justify restricting migrants' rights (Calderón et al., 2020).

However, right-wing extremist discourses linked to migration have a greater reach and are able to penetrate more deeply into society due to the problem of disinformation among citizens. Information and media manipulation can play a major role in election campaigns, for example, with the introduction of fake news. In this case, social networks become the perfect ally for the rapid spread of such messages, and it is sometimes difficult to differentiate between true and false information. Moreover, negative information, in this case, news that undermines migrants, tends to go viral faster than positive news (Barragán & Ferrer, 2019).

This phenomenon was exacerbated with the migration crisis of 2015. The uncontrollable migration flows struggling to enter the EU borders, enabled radical-right wing parties to use rhetoric against migrants, presenting them as a threat to national sovereignty. Hence, many EU states since the beginning of the crisis, adopted a strong position against assisting the migrants. In particular, governments in countries like Poland, Hungary, or Czech Republic builded fences so as to prevent the entry of immigrants in their territory. Until today, far-right parties remain powerful in the EU context, with the I&D group possessing 9.8% of the total seats in the European Parliament.

To be able to deal with the extreme-right, the EU should focus on fundamental values such as pluralism, rule of law and democracy while engaging in a direct way with its citizens.

**To achieve this:**

- Encourage MSs to launch educational programs in primary and secondary education, where students could have the opportunity to take part in workshops, working in “mix groups”, to combat the stereotypes and promote social tolerance.
- Promote cultural exchange programs and extend the scope of already existing ones, such as Erasmus+, by including visits and exchanges to countries of the ENP South region so as to promote social inclusion and normalise differences among cultural backgrounds.
- Encourage MSs to launch exchange training programs for teachers in order to raise awareness about the importance of critically assessing disinformation, to avoid the development of a “hate rhetoric” against migration.
- Support MSs initiatives to create virtual spaces, such as platforms, apps, websites, dedicated specifically to migrants. In these spaces, individuals from third countries

that have a legal residence permit in an EU MSs can enter a “safe space”, enabling them to express themselves freely regarding issues of political nature and hence, participate actively in the public dialogue.

- Empower EU Disinfo Platform by creating a space exclusively dedicated to migrants rights where a ‘positive rhetoric’ would be launched concerning their rights, their possible contribution to social welfare, the importance of their social inclusion.
- Create a European migration data space, where accredited EU journalists would have exclusive access in order to use impartial information provided by EU institutions and agencies, and then, communicate it through national channels.
- Support the creation of an EU monitoring instrument that would annually assess the progress made in relation to these recommendations in each MS by completing reports and providing further proposals for the enhancement of these programs.

## Linguistic Minorities

Another issue we wanted to analyse for this special occasion is the protection and integration of linguistic minorities within the European Union. We decided to work on this topic after observing that, despite the European Union recognizing the importance of diversity in its motto, there are few tools that truly achieve this purpose for language minorities. This situation is even more striking when considering that some MSs have regressed on this issue, such as Latvia with its laws diminishing the importance of its Russian-speaking population in society (Nicolas Camut, Politico, 2023).

There are few instruments at the EU level that protect the rights of linguistic minorities, mainly Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and Articles 21 and 22 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights. While these tools exist, their wording is rather vague and could be seen as a political statement promoting the Union's stance on minority perception rather than a concrete legal framework.

We are aware that the Commission has no competence over this issue. However, we believe that some steps could be taken at the EU level to promote a healthier system, improve cooperation, and enhance the current situation. To do so, we argue that one of the best approaches could be to adapt or reconsider existing tools such as the “European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages” (ECRML) and the “Minority SafePack Initiative” (MSPI).

The ECRML is a tool created by the Council of Europe to protect linguistic minorities. However, the text can be seen as having major shortcomings and exploitable loopholes that prevent effective protection of these minorities. We have three major concerns regarding the text. First, as countries are not obligated to sign the Charter, only 25

countries have ratified it so far, and only 16 of them are EU MSs (Council of Europe, 2023). Some significant European contributors, such as France, Italy, or Belgium, are not part of it. Second, the Charter has a peculiar characteristic, different from all other international treaties, which is found in Article 2, paragraph 2: a minimum of 35 paragraphs or sub-paragraphs chosen among the 68 provisions of Part 3." Part 3 contains practical measures expected from ratifying states, with varying degrees of potency. Few countries apply the Charter in full force (Ramallo, 2019). Additionally, ratifying states have to specify which languages they recognize as minority languages, which allows for the exclusion of certain languages from protection (Soldat-Jaffe, 2015). Furthermore, it should be noted that the languages referred to in the text are territorial or historical languages, meaning that the Charter does not cover languages of migrating populations unless a ratifying country expressly includes them (Sobczak et al., 2022). Finally, the monitoring system by experts has been criticised for lacking means to ensure governments' commitments and lacking access to the legal system (Ramallo, 2019; Sobczak, 2022).

All of our recommendations imply a reconsideration of the current charter and significant modifications.

#### **To achieve this:**

- **Rethink the core principles of the Charter, such as the cherry-picking of paragraphs (Art.2(2)) and the definition of language minorities (Art.1).** We argue that there needs to be a change in the possibility for states to selectively include certain aspects, as this creates significant disparities in commitments among countries. Asking for a higher degree of implementation or requiring all criteria to be applied, or finding a similar level of commitment in national law, would be beneficial for the populations at stake. Additionally, instead of allowing countries to specify which languages they will protect, the Charter should extend some or all of its aspects to a broader audience. Populations that have arrived through migration but are now firmly established in a given country should have some access to protection. We understand that implementing this in all aspects of the Charter may pose challenges in certain countries, especially regarding educational promotion, but we argue that if the population is significant enough, it should be included in the decision-making process.
- **Restart a discussion procedure that would invite more states to the table in order to encourage more countries to sign the treaty.** This recommendation aligns with our previous statements. We believe that there should be a new wave of invitations to countries that have not ratified the Charter yet. This would encourage their participation and provide better protection for minorities.
- **Establish a better monitoring system that includes more tangible punishments in case of Charter breaches.** While we appreciate that the monitoring system is conducted by independent experts who should have less bias, we maintain that it

should include a mechanism for legal action against countries that violate the Charter's articles. Finding more enforcement and accountability mechanisms is crucial.

## The Minority SafePack Initiative (MSPI)

The MSPI is a civil initiative that was submitted to the Commission in 2020 after gathering more than a million signatures, making it the fifth European Citizens' Initiative to reach that threshold. It advocates for the creation of an EU-level framework that would provide a "safepack" for the well-being of linguistic and national minorities. It aims to cover core aspects such as media representation, education and culture, promotion of diversity, funding, and participation. Although it received support from the European Parliament, the European Commission (2021) stated that, while it acknowledges the merits of the proposals, there are already plenty of other instruments serving this purpose and thus no further action would be taken. The group behind the initiative pursued an annulment procedure at the European Court of Justice, which was subsequently denied. They have been in the annulment procedure since 2023. This tension has been reinforced as recently as the 13th of June, when the Parliament reminded the Commission of how unsatisfied it was of seeing that nothing had been done despite their firm support of the proposal (European Parliament, 2023).

### To achieve this:

- **Restart the process and allow the MSPI to fully present its case.** We believe that the framework recommended by the initiative should be reassessed, as it addresses key aspects of the issue for which the EU currently lacks solutions, such as "stateless minorities". We also argue that in the current context with the return of the discussion surrounding the status of candidate state, the critique of making the MSs respect the Copenhagen criteria on the protection of the rights of minorities the more relevant (Minority SafePack Initiative, 2020).

## Differences in Treatment of Migrants according to their Country of Origin

To address the differences in the treatment of migrants, we tackle the question of the activation of the EU Temporary Protection Directive (TPD), the situations in which its activation has been required by different MS having a negative answer, contrasting the effectiveness with which it has been triggered on this occasion with the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The TPD is an EU tool to provide immediate and temporary protection in the event of many displaced people from non-EU countries who cannot return to their country of origin due to an armed conflict or systematic violations of human rights (European Commission, 2001). It, therefore, envisages a protection status based on groups, granting residence permits to beneficiaries. The protection is limited to one year, but it can be extended. MSs cannot provide for fewer rights than those offered by the TPD regarding housing, employment, social welfare, family reunification, and education rights (CEPS Policy Insight, 2022).

This is indeed a step forward through solidarity and those who need protection. However, even if the TPD has existed since 2001, it has only been activated more than twenty years later with Ukrainian refugees fleeing war. Despite many calls for the activation of the Directive to deal with the large-scale displacement of refugees arriving in the EU from Libya, Afghanistan or Syria, the Directive has never been applied in practice; it has been reputed as "politically unrealistic" (CEPS Policy Insight, 2022). The activation of the Directive raises criticism concerning the concepts underpinning the EU's asylum policy and the principle of solidarity enshrined in the art. 80 of TEU (CEPS Policy Insight, 2022). Why did the conflict in Ukraine have different considerations from other recent conflicts in non-European countries regarding the EU's asylum policy?

More than witnessing the activation of for the first time of the TPD which has been in place for more than 20 years, we have witnessed an unprecedented solidarity from MS, such as Hungary (UNHCR, Operational Data Portal, Ukraine Refugee Situation), which after the 2015 Syrian refugee arrivals decided to build fences on its borders (The Guardian, 2018). Such a difference in the receptiveness of the MS also demonstrates the fragmentation that the EU faces nowadays, with some States aligning less and less with the EU values and defying its foundations.

We do not seek to criticise the activation of the Directive because it was necessary and urgent; however, we question why was not the same activation done in 2015 and 2021 with, respectively, the Syrian and Afghan humanitarian crises. People were fleeing from wars and arriving in Europe the same way Ukrainians deserved the same legal protection. More than that, with the 2015 migration crisis, the EU signed the "Statement and Action Plan" with Turkey. The signature of this action plan sought to stop "the irregular flow of migration from Turkey to Europe", leading to the fact that "all new irregular migrants and asylum seekers arriving from Turkey to the Greek islands, and whose applications for asylum have been declared inadmissible should be returned to Turkey." (Legislative Train, European Parliament). This Agreement demonstrates a perception of migrants and asylum seekers utterly different from the perception now of Ukrainian refugees. During this

period, several human rights claims and violations took place because a lack of protection for these migrants and asylum seekers was spread across the EU. The situation with Turkey, for example, led to several results, one of them being the usage of migrants as “instruments” or “weapons” for political bargains. (Brussels International Center). Based on the universality of human rights and equal treatment, it is not comprehensible how and why the EU would have different policies towards different people.

Regarding the rights guaranteed by the temporary directive, one of the rights is the possibility to apply for a job or have a residence without needing asylum approval for three years. When it comes to the non-temporary Directive asylum seekers, they can only start looking for a job once they recognise that they are eligible for asylum, so from the moment they are recognised as asylum seekers. We do not consider that the TPD should have been applied to every migratory situation that has taken place. However, we consider that certain situations could have been temporary, as the name of the TPD indicates, through this instrument. The Syrian War and the Afghan new regime with the Taliban, which led to mass migration, are illustrative examples.

It is, therefore, crucial to rethink the foundations of the EU common asylum system in order to not act through unfair double standards. We hope that from now and with the activation of the TPD, the EU will be more willing to activate it once again, if ever needed, and that the MS will demonstrate more solidarity.

**To achieve this, the EU must:**

- **Use the TPD whenever the situation requires such activation, considering that it simplifies the process.** Such a situation must meet clearly defined criteria, including a threshold, understood as a fixed number of migrants coming to the EU within a certain period or an emergency that requires humanitarian aid. This would decide to trigger the TPD more automatically and less of a political decision. The current definition and criterium of a "mass influx" is not sufficiently specific to describe a situation in a concerned country. This is important because utilising the TPD when necessary simplifies processes. The complex procedures and bureaucratic hurdles associated with migration and asylum processes can be streamlined by activating the TPD in relevant situations. This simplification can lead to more efficient and effective handling of migration-related matters, ensuring that individuals needing protection receive timely assistance and reducing administrative burdens for all parties involved. Moreover, a generalised application of the TPD will lessen the instances of alleged double-standards of asylum-seekers' treatment by the EU.
- **Ensure that the new EU Asylum Pact considers that it is crucial to guarantee equal treatment between migrants' origins.** In other words, the EU must treat migrants, asylum seekers and refugees equally depending on their origins, respecting the equal



treatment and human rights the EU so deeply pursues. This is important because ensuring equal treatment between migrants' origins is essential for a fair and just asylum system. The new EU Asylum Pact should recognize the significance of treating migrants from different countries or regions equally and without discrimination. By guaranteeing equal treatment, the EU promotes a system based on fairness, human rights, and non-discrimination principles. It helps prevent bias or prejudice based on nationality or country of origin, ensuring that all asylum seekers are assessed and treated based on their circumstances and protection needs. This fosters a more inclusive and humane approach to asylum and reflects the values of equality and respect that the EU strives to uphold.

- **Ensure that the New Pact of Asylum and Migration is based on the principle of solidarity.** The Pact is one of the priorities of the current European Commission, and its negotiations are underway before the end of its mandate. The topic should be based on the principle of solidarity as much as possible to reach the best outcome for EU MSs and asylum seekers. The EU should emphasise solidarity among EU MSs to pass key changes, including mandatory border procedures and flexible solidarity through relocations or financial contributions.
- **Ensure that the Proposal for a Regulation on instrumentalisation in migration and asylum prioritises fundamental rights and serves as a last resort rather than bypassing existing legislation.** Moreover, it is crucial to understand that the Instrumentalisation Regulation and the toolbox are not standalone solutions. Instead, the EU should integrate both into an updated migration diplomacy approach recognising how third countries exploit instrumentalisation to reveal coercive interests. The EU must set clear objectives, align policies accordingly, and avoid a security-focused narrative to achieve this. These components will shape the EU's future strategy on migration instrumentalisation.

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# Policy Recommendations by the Working Group on Defence and Security

*Working Group Members: Ziad Dakroub, Felix Fend, Maël Leroux, Paula Notivoli Cabezas, Alba San Juan Morales, Filippo Segato and Giada Spreafico.*

## Introduction: Towards a Full Strategic Autonomy

In the face of unprecedented global challenges, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the escalating rivalry between the United States and China, the European Union finds itself at a critical juncture. These complex geopolitical dynamics underscore the pressing need for the EU to pursue a comprehensive approach to strategic autonomy, in order to safeguard its security, assert its interests, and play a significant role on the global stage. Such approach requires addressing key dimensions of the security and defence policy, and we decided to focus on energy security, defence in space, and the EU-NATO cooperation: three policy fields that we consider particularly relevant for the achievement of strategic autonomy, due to their interconnectedness and impact on the EU's ability to act independently. By analysing these dimensions and proposing concrete policy recommendations, we thus sought to shed light on the vital steps the EU must take to attain full strategic autonomy.

As concerns the first dimension, energy security, it is undoubtable that the EU's heavy reliance on fossil fuels poses significant vulnerabilities for the bloc, both from a political and environmental perspective. Diversifying energy sources, promoting renewable energy, and reducing dependence on fossil fuels are critical measures. By enhancing energy efficiency, investing in clean technologies, and supporting sustainable energy production, the EU can decrease its reliance on external energy suppliers, thereby bolstering its autonomy in energy-related decision-making.

The second dimension, defence in space, also plays an increasingly fundamental role in the EU's pursuit of strategic autonomy. The space, including satellite communication and space-based assets, has indeed become indispensable for security, communication, and navigation systems. A genuine commitment to streamlining EU space governance, addressing space pollution, and ensuring safe and effective satellite communication is therefore essential.

Finally, the third dimension, the EU-NATO partnership, has assumed renewed significance in the aftermath of the outbreak of a war in the old continent, something which was long deemed to be unthinkable. In view of the recent events, the EU should aim to strengthen its complementarity with NATO and more actively engage in the promotion of a partnership that leverages each organisation's respective strengths. To pursue such highly-desirable

greater complementarity with NATO, the EU should prioritise the industrial and the political dimensions of the partnership, honing its industrial and technological potential, while simultaneously making full use of its diplomatic influence to shape security initiatives aimed at fostering dialogue and cooperation with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

## Energy Security

Energy security in the EU entails diversifying energy sources, promoting renewables, and reducing reliance on fossil fuels. It involves robust infrastructure, interconnections, and storage to ensure uninterrupted energy flow. Energy efficiency measures and conservation practices are crucial for sustainable consumption. The EU aims for a competitive internal energy market and engages in energy diplomacy to secure supply contracts and foster stability. Research and innovation drive technological advancements for resilience. Climate change mitigation is a key component of energy security. Cross-border cooperation enhances resilience and reduces costs. Consumer protection ensures affordability, reliability, and transparency in energy markets, promoting a secure and sustainable energy future for all member states.

### To achieve this:

- **Monitoring the supply chain and the supply countries**

The EU actively monitors and diversifies its energy supply chain by seeking new energy partners and investing in gas and other resources. It prioritises securing stable and affordable gas supplies while also promoting renewable energy partnerships. Technological innovation and sustainability considerations play a crucial role in the EU's approach. The goal is to enhance energy security and reduce geopolitical risks. Bilateral and multilateral cooperation facilitate mutual investments and collaboration. The EU's strategies are continuously evaluated and adapted to changing market conditions. One particular occasion in which it has been possible to witness a diversification of supplies is after the break of the war in Ukraine caused by Russia, after that the EU had indeed to go in search for new energy partners in order to counter the stop of supplies from Moscow. It is important to take into consideration the fact that also for the green energies the connections with the supply chain are indeed important since the majority of the raw material used to build the green energy provider come from countries where the rule of law is in discussion. China is in fact the biggest exporter of rare earths needed to complete the shift to green energy. The use of conditionalities for the import may be a practice but the request is big. Overall, the EU aims to ensure a resilient and sustainable energy supply that aligns with its climate goals and contributes to a cleaner and more secure future while trying to respect its values.

- **Make sure that the energy usage respects the objectives of the Green Deal**

The European Green Deal is a transformative policy framework introduced by the European Commission. It aims to make Europe climate-neutral by 2050 and reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero. The deal focuses on decarbonization across sectors, promotes clean

energy transition, and advocates for a circular economy. Biodiversity protection, sustainable transport, and a just transition are also key components. Research, innovation, and global leadership in climate action are emphasized to achieve this plan and the EU should invest in those as well to reach the objectives faster and smoother. Scientific approach is thus needed and the collaboration between these environments the industries behind them and politics is necessary to create a partnership and work together.. The deal is supported by significant funding and investment, aiming to mobilize resources for the green transition. In summary, the European Green Deal strives to create a sustainable and resilient future, positioning Europe as a leader in climate action while driving global change.

- **Investing in the research of more productive and efficient forms of energy production**

The Energy research and innovation strategy of the EU is very comprehensive, as it includes the Clean energy strategy, the European Green Deal, Horizon Europe and REPowerEU. However, it is very important that the EU keeps investing in research and innovation to produce the correct solutions and create system transformations that will help achieve climate neutrality in 2050. These actions need to focus on the increase of renewables, carriers of clean energy, fast decarbonization and general energy efficiency. Investigations will be beneficial for the efficiency of renewable energies value chains, and the implementation of sustainability in them. In addition, the development of innovative technologies for renewables is key, as well as finding solutions for energy storage.

- **Re-power EU, a plan for saving energy, producing clean energy, diversifying our energy supplies**

This plan helps the EU to save energy, produce clean energy and diversify its energy supplies in the context of the Ukrainian-Russian war. The main achievements have been the reduction of the EU's dependency on Russia's fossil fuels, the improvement in the deployment of additional assets of renewable energy, the saving of around 20% of energy consumption and a limit to the gas price, as well as the global oil one. This means that the strategy has attained the protection of EU citizens from energy shortages, facilitated the green transition and helped Ukraine. All of this is thanks to four main actions: the diversification of the energy supply, saving energy, securing affordable energy supplies with external gas suppliers, and investing in renewable energy. In order to continue this path, we suggest that the EU complies with the following objectives they stated: the implementation of national REPowerEU chapters in the Recovery and Resilience Facility, new investments in energy interconnections and infrastructure, the application of new legislation for obtaining renewable energy faster, furthering industrial decarbonisation, a regulatory framework to improve energy efficiency and a new one for hydrogen.

- **Cohesion policy, a plan on member states' dependence on fossil fuels and the increase of investment prices.**

The cohesion policy helps reduce regional disparities in the EU. Member states' dependence on fossil fuels hinders the transition to cleaner energy sources. Investment prices may rise during the shift to renewable energy. EU funding and the Just Transition Fund support the

transition. Cohesion policy targets regions heavily reliant on fossil fuels. The transition brings economic opportunities and long-term benefits. Policy coherence is crucial for effective implementation. The EU aims to reduce carbon emissions and enhance energy security. The cohesion policy aligns with this goal. Overall, it promotes sustainable development and economic equality across member states. (European Parliament, The European Green Deal, Cohesion policy, 2021 and European Commission, €378 billion Cohesion Policy up and running to boost EU's regions 2023).

- **Nuclear Energy: the case of the new plants in France**

Last year France announced its strategy to build 14 new nuclear reactors to safeguard energy prices and lower greenhouse gas emissions. This return to nuclear energy comes as a result of the high gas prices and the struggle of consumers. The opinion on this issue is divided, but it is important to acknowledge that nuclear energy is a low-carbon type of energy and has a great role in the achievement of climate goals. The reserves of uranium are still big and countries such as Canada and Australia, which are more aligned with the values of the Union, are able to provide a big amount of that. Nonetheless the initial costs, which are indeed big, and the problems of the wastes both these issues are overcome by the greater amount of energy produced. In France, this kind of energy amounts to 70% of the energy supply, so what we propose is that the EU tackles the possibility of investing more in nuclear energy, at least during the energy crisis the Union is living in. By the improvement of legislation and safety standards, the EU can contribute to the better development of nuclear stations of those Member States that want to take part in this and safely take care of nuclear waste.

- **Joint buying of gas among all the member States**

As it has been done with the vaccines case, joint buying of gas among EU member states aims to enhance energy security and affordability by leveraging collective bargaining power. It promotes solidarity, market integration, and diversification of gas sources. By pooling resources and expertise, risks and vulnerabilities can be mitigated. Transparency and compliance with competition laws are crucial. Operational challenges and diverse member state interests must be addressed. The ultimate goal is to benefit consumers with an affordable and reliable gas supply. Joint gas procurement aligns with the EU's broader energy strategy and long-term vision for an integrated and sustainable energy system. Implementation requires careful consideration of legal, regulatory, and geopolitical factors.

## Defence in Space

*The Strategic Compass for Security and Defence identified Space as a strategic domain and called for an EU Space Strategy for Security and Defence. This last Strategy was approved in March 2023. The recent developments and our dependence on this strategic domain have proven its importance. Because of the breadth of issues that defence in Space encompasses, we have decided to focus on three: governance, pollution and communications.*

## Space governance

Space governance involves political and administrative actors, which produce national policies, the EU Space Programme and the European Space Agency (ESA) policy. National policies are, of course, passed by national governments. The EU Space Programme is implemented by the Directorate-General for Defence Industry and Space (DG DEFIS) of the European Commission. This DG is not the only section of the EU dealing with space policy, as the European External Action Service is also competent, the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP) as some tasks that have been delegated to the Special Envoy for Space, and the EU Military Staff. In the EU there are different agencies that also deal with space policy: the EU Space Programme Agency (EUSPA), the European Defence Agency (EDA), the European Security and Defence College (ESDC) and the EU Satellite Centre (EU SatCen). Lastly, ESA is an intergovernmental international organisation which gathers 22 member States (some EU member States plus Norway, the United Kingdom and Switzerland). In 2021 a Financial Framework Partnership Agreement (FFPA) was signed between the EU and ESA, and is one of the foundations of the EU Spatial Programme. In this context, as part of the non-dependence strategy of the European Commission, ESA and EDA, a Joint Task Force was established. One of the main reasons that led us to focus on Space governance was its complex set up and the difficulty to understand who does what. Talking to EU Officials has helped us to see the full picture and realise that those overlaps that we thought do not exist; however, this does not mean that the framework could not be improved.

### To achieve this:

- With the creation of the Infrastructure for Resilience, Interconnectivity and Security by Satellite (IRIS<sup>2</sup>) the European Commission has introduced a new governance model in which there is first a competitive public tendering process run by the European Commission. The second part of this model is where ESA member States come in and accept the contractor identified by the Commission. Thus, there is a competitive process and the geographical return is a posteriori. We recommend to extend this new model of governance to all EU-led initiatives that are covered by the EU-ESA FFPA;
- The EU SatCen agency should be renamed to a name that reflects the responsibilities of this agency, as an intelligence agency;
- Make EU Space Governance framework clearer and more accessible, as it would allow academics, stakeholders and industry to understand how competences are distributed and who does what. In addition, this will contribute to knowledge sharing, and to accountability of the competent actors.



## Space pollution

The increasing number of satellite launches into space has led to the creation of [several hundred thousand pieces](#) of space debris - either whole objects (launch rocket stages, satellites reaching the end of their life) or fragments of objects (loose paint, screws, etc.) that travel through our low-earth and geostationary orbits at a speed of 8 km/s. The risks are numerous: in the event of a collision with debris, a European satellite could be damaged or even completely destroyed, and any collision creates even more debris - making space activity even more dangerous. This is Kessler's theory, where the mechanical multiplication of space debris beyond a certain threshold would render an entire orbit unusable for several decades - which, if it were to happen in low earth orbit where 60% of our space debris is today, would deprive us of the ability to launch satellites even into more distant orbits. This is obviously a major issue for the European Union, and several projects have been launched to improve both our space debris monitoring and orbit clearance. However, our two main methods today remain satellite armouring and satellite avoidance manoeuvres, but neither of these techniques is fully effective and both are very costly. It is therefore necessary to (re)think about the way we deal with space pollution, both in terms of the policies implemented - launch, construction, depollution - and of the legal framework. The EU Approach for Space Traffic Management, the Space Strategy for Security and Defence and the Council conclusions on Fair and sustainable use of space are important milestones and must be implemented in the best possible way and as quickly as possible. However, a global approach at international level is essential if we really are to avoid the worst-case scenarios and guarantee sustainable access to space.

### To achieve this:

- The EU legislative framework has given a definition of “space debris” (Article 2 of Regulation 2021/696). Such a definition should be promoted at international level to provide for a single global definition of space debris. This would be the first step toward a binding international treaty on space debris mitigation and recovery, which should be quickly adopted to avoid aggravating the current damage, especially in low earth orbit;
- At the same time, the EU should foster compliance with existing international non-binding standards to strengthen their implementation. The EU should also push for greater consideration of environmental sustainability in space activities, drawing on its own commitment as demonstrated by Article 8 of Regulation 2023/588;
- The EU should participate to the relevant Treaties and Conventions on outer space, especially the Rescue Agreement and the Liability Convention. There is a need to define, through a mandatory international standard of conduct, the precise liability of States, international organisations and private players in the event of collision between two objects in space, or in de-orbiting operations.

## Space communication

Full European autonomy regarding autonomy in space also requires the continued guarantee of stable and secure lines of communication. Especially nowadays crises such as the war in Ukraine and or cyber attacks by foreign governments have shown the urgent necessity of providing stable lines of communicational exchange first and foremost for government communication, but also for the functioning of the private sector in unexpected disruptions to traditional communication or cyberthreats. Consequently, the EU has adopted an EU space-based secure connectivity system called IRIS<sup>2</sup>, equipped with a budget of 2.4 billion €, (Infrastructure for Resilience, Interconnection and Security by Satellites) in 2022, aiming to set up a proper satellite constellation to provide satellite communication services for governmental (i.e. secure communications for EU embassies) and commercial use to protect critical infrastructure, support external action or crisis management, but also to provide commercial services in an are-wide approach. Initial services shall be set up by 2024 and full operation shall be achieved by 2027.

### To achieve this

- Long-term budgetary commitment for IRIS<sup>2</sup>: Necessity for a political and financial long term commitment in order to provide a long-term credibility beyond the Multi Annual Financial Framework until 2027 of the program not only for governments, but also for the private sector;
- Access for EU membership candidate countries and countries with which the EU has concluded a Europe association agreement in order to ensure stable and secure government communication via GovCom serving as a protection from destabilization efforts of systemic rivals (i.e. Russia and China). On the same, boosting competitiveness and economic growth and the ties to the European market in the respective countries by providing 5G connection and private services via SatCom;
- NATO Cooperation agreement: Pooling and exchange of information between both NATO members and the EU in order to improve crisis response and mechanism, but also to bolster the transatlantic cooperation in the field of defense.

## EU-NATO cooperation

The findings of the team were centred around a primary objective: complementarity. It is unproductive to replace what already works, and it is rather clear that, at least some, of the Defence-related functions are filled by NATO in a satisfactory manner. The group therefore focused on advancing proposals that reinforce aspects of Defence policy that NATO is either unable or unwilling to fulfil, yet are still crucial to guarantee the continent's security. More specifically, these reforms would make use of the EU's treaty-mandated competences to improve the EU-NATO Defence structure. Accordingly, the team concluded on the following reforms to considerably improve the EU's productivity as one of the Transatlantic Defence

pillars. To this purpose, two aspects of transatlantic relations were considered, the economic-industrial dimension and the political-diplomatic dimension, where we believe the EU could play a greater role, with the ultimate goal of ensuring greater complementarity with NATO.

**To achieve this:**

- **Reform of the decision-making procedure:** Following the start of the invasion war in Ukraine, the Union launched several initiatives aimed at bolstering its Defence-Industrial capacity and supporting Ukraine's military defence effort. These include the European Defence Industrial Reinforcement through common Procurement Act (EDIRPA), the reinforcement and repurposing of the European Peace Facility (EPF), and most recently the Act in Support of Ammunition Production (ASAP), and all of them, despite representing significant developments in the EU's defence-industrial capabilities, face the same problem: Trust. Indeed, both member States and defence industry firms have been hesitant when it comes to sharing confidential information with the EU institutions by -legitimate- fear of compromising leaks. Therefore, the team's first suggestion is to **adapt EU policy-making practices to the culture of confidentiality in Defence-Related negotiations**. Indeed, the European Union is not hardwired to hold substantial Defence related negotiations, and while serious dissensus and disagreements occur among policymakers in democracies outside the Union, seldom do we see as many leaked drafts and disagreements given the sensitivity of the informations discussed; the Commission is simply facing the consequences of this reality, as it is unable to acquire the most sensitive information relating to stockpiles, technology, crucial in developing a coherent and effective policy. While Institution-specific initiatives are emerging, such as the Czech presidency creating an ad hoc working groups specifically to debate EDIRPA, or the Commission's inclusion of specific confidentiality rules related to processing informations in its ASAP draft proposal, what is probably required is a legally binding EU-wide universally applicable protocol that ensures all confidentiality related concerts, probably through the means of an inter-institutional agreement. It is important however to note that such a procedure should also consider transparency safeguards for the the least sensitive informations, and a requirement to respect the principle of proportionality when dealing with classified informations. This will allow to strike a balance between transparency on the one hand and confidentiality on the other.
- **Restructure and increase EU funding:** While starting the late 2010s, the EU considerably increasing its investment in EU Defence-Industrial Research and Development (R&D), and the war in Ukraine led it to further develop its support structure through the introduction of acquisition-support funds. These initiatives remain however secluded from non defence-related funding schemes, and the amounts within these funds by itself is far from sufficient to effectively support the

European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB) in its quest for competitiveness on the global markets. The team's second proposal is therefore to **adopt a holistic approach to Defence and Military aid investments**, which implies breaking the Defence-related taboo in most other industrial and cohesion EU funding programs. This entails in practice measures such as the inclusion of Defence producers in the yet to be introduced EU Sovereignty Fund, allowing the European Investment Bank to fund Defence-Related projects. Furthermore, considerations of the impact of some key legislations such as the regulation on Critical Raw Materials and the European Chips Act on the EDTIB should be systematically considered in impact assessments. Such measures are increasingly important, especially considering the increasingly multidisciplinary challenges that the EU faces. They would therefore better adapt the European economy to the EU's emerging need to assume the role of geopolitical actor.

- **Increase the budget dedicated to the European Defence Fund and further focus on the pressing issue of weapon systems duplication:** The European Defence Fund is aimed at funding defence-related research and development projects. Member States settled for a budget of around 8Bn Euros attributed to the fund, considerably less than the initially proposed 13Bn. The Budget should be revised to 13Bn (as initially suggested by the Commission), one of the most significant hurdles in the way of the political will for further funding is the duplications of weapon systems across the EU, making common investments in arms acquisitions very hard and considerably below the 35% threshold recommended by the EDA, concentrating on minimising duplication could therefore significantly contribute to solving this problem.
- **Improve the EU's internal strategic coherence.** In shaping its cooperation with NATO, the EU should prioritise the enhancement of its internal strategic coherence. A well-defined and consistent unified European approach towards shared security objectives would strengthen the EU's credibility as a reliable partner. The EEAS could significantly contribute to promoting the alignment of EU member States' foreign policy, by leveraging its diplomatic expertise to bridge divergent viewpoints. The High Representative, in particular, could help build consensus, by proposing compromises that take into account the concerns of all parties involved in the discussion.
- **Strengthen EU-NATO political dialogue.** Strengthening dialogue is crucial to foster mutual understanding of each organisation's perspectives, values and objectives, thereby reducing the risk of potential conflict and facilitating the adoption of a common approach towards shared goals. To this purpose, regular meetings and consultations could be organised between EU and NATO political representatives to discuss issues of common interest and coordinate positions. This may include bilateral meetings, thematic dialogues or formal consultations at various levels.
- **Intensify information and intelligence sharing among Member States and between the EU and NATO.** The systematic exchange of information and intelligence is paramount for security, as it allows for timely identification and effective response to

threats, especially in the case of those stemming from transnational crime, such as terrorism and cyber attacks. The EU should therefore improve this particular dimension of its partnership with NATO by promoting the exchange of information, intelligence, and assessments on shared security concerns and by stimulating the emergence of a culture of collaboration between the two organisations. The EEAS can play a pivotal role in this, by becoming the EU body responsible for both the establishment of coordination mechanisms, such as regular consultations and joint briefings, and the development of secure information exchange platforms and protocols that ensure the appropriate safeguard of classified information.

# Policy Recommendations by the Working Group on Climate, Environment & Health

*Working Group Members: María Carmela Noviello, Sami Chauvet, Lucas Maurer, Olivier Levy and Cosimo Bartoloni, Maria Carmela Noviello (facilitator) and Olivier Levy (facilitator).*

## Just and Social Green Transition

*The main objective of this section is to analyse the social consequences of the change of direction of European policies and the consequences for workers and families in general*

### Workers' perspective

This section of the policy recommendation will explore some of the issues that workers will face in these crucial years of transformation as they develop new skills and adapt to a new work environment. It is a fact that the energy and digital transition will have a huge impact on the labour market. The dismantling of highly carbonised systems and polluting industries will force some workers to leave their job positions and seek new employment. These new positions will require different and more specialised skills, some of which workers do not necessarily possess. In structuring such ambitious and transformative projects, the EU has the duty to prevent and marginalise the social impact of these changes. As outlined by the Commission: “It (the Just Transition Mechanism) will also strive to protect the citizens and workers most vulnerable to the transition, providing access to re-skilling programmes, jobs in new economic sectors, or energy-efficient housing. The Commission will work with the Member States and regions to help them put in place territorial transition plans”. Under the plan, some workers will be retrained and integrated into the new green system, while others will be reallocated to other sectors. The following paragraphs point out two main issues linked with the social approach adopted in the European Green Deal:

- **Scarce and almost absent European guidelines** on how to achieve an equitable and just transition, showing a **growing but still embryonic awareness** of the social consequences of these changes.
- **A lack of intra-state coordination in re-skilling programs**, which could lead to a fragmented and diversified Union running at two different speeds. The green transition will entail a radical transformation of economic activities and will force us to rethink production systems in various labour sectors. These changes will affect both the quality and the quantity of available jobs. In quantitative terms, this evolution affects most sectors; while new sectors will be refined and strengthened (e.g., wind or solar energy sectors), others will be completely transformed (e.g., the automotive and construction sectors) and new occupations will emerge as new opportunities for workers to compensate, replace or supplement other types of activities.

### To achieve this, we recommend:

- Accompany **intra-state coordination to national plans** vertically approved by the EU institutions. Member States independently set their national plans in coordination with the regions most affected by the transition, but they do not have a transnational coordination plan in terms of skills to be strengthened, new skills to be introduced from scratch in certain sectors, and so on. In order to promote a balanced job transition, a **new framework** should be created, defining:
  - **General guidelines** for skills that should be acquired by 2050;
  - **Common transnational retraining programmes** to enable people to be ready for this rapid and impetuous transformation, to enable mobility and give workers the opportunity to familiarise themselves with new technologies that may be more developed in other countries (Providing financial support for workers to retrain or qualify abroad).
  - **strengthen the Just Transition Platform** this is an informal channel of communication which doesn't set deadlines and common objectives that Member States should achieve. In fact, there is already a platform at the EU level to facilitate the communication of member states on these issues, the Just Transition Platform, a space for the exchange of information and experiences, as well as for discussing issues linked to the Just Transition process throughout the European Union, with regular physical and online meetings on relevant topics. It is, of course, an important network for discussion and comparison to exchange best practices and to get a clear view of country developments and progress. However, this is an informal channel of communication which doesn't set deadlines and common objectives that Member States should achieve.

### Households' perspective

When analysing the EU's just transition instruments, a first important shortcoming is the lack of a holistic approach towards the inequalities created by climate change and by the EU's policies (Crespy & Munta, 2023). This is visible in several aspects. First, not all social impacts of climate change are considered under the JTF & Social Climate Fund (SCF). The JTF compensates regions with high employment in fossil fuel energy production (EPRS, 2020), while the SCF aims to negate the regressive impacts for vulnerable households of the new emission trading systems (European Commission, 2023). Several key social impacts remain unaddressed under this institutional framework. Furthermore, these instruments adopt the mainstream 'green growth' paradigm as they continue to pursue increased output (Crespy & Munta, 2023). It has been argued that this pure focus on income is incompatible with a genuine just transition approach.

A final element providing evidence for a missing integrated vision is the EU's lack of an intersectional approach in the measuring of inequalities. In its most recent report on monitoring the progress towards the SDGs (Eurostat, 2022), the way in which the EU measures its progress towards SDG 10 ('Reduced inequalities') fails to take into account many of the demographic factors directly impacting distributional inequalities (Hubert, 2023; Soler, 2023). In view of this methodology, it is clear that many socially regressive impacts of climate change and the EU's policies are not taken into account in the establishment of just transition instruments, overlooking

vulnerable parts of the population when determining which households will receive temporary direct income support (Bruegel, 2020; Crespy & Munta, 2023).

The current instruments also lack funds. The budget foreseen for the JTF and SCF is considered to be too low to adequately compensate the most affected workers through regional help and to provide sufficient temporary direct income support (Bruegel, 2020; Crespy & Munta, 2023; EPSU, 2020; Euractiv, 2021; European Court of Auditors, 2020; European Parliament, 2021). As one green MEP put it when talking about the JTF: “It’s just too small”. Similar comments emerged on the SCF (Euractiv, 2022). Everything cannot be blamed on the EU’s Member States, as even the budget in the initial Commission proposal seems to have been rather on the low side (Crespy & Munta, 2023; European Court of Auditors, 2020). This budget seems rather arbitrary instead of based on an estimation of which amount would actually be necessary for a just transition (Bruegel, 2020).

Finally, the governance structure of the JTF relies on supporting Member States’ territorial just transition plans, which are established under the cohesion policy framework (EPRS, 2020). In these national plans, Member States determine which regions should receive support, and the money is distributed through these plans. Another risk for fragmentation flows from the formula used to determine the distribution of funds among regions and Member States, which does not reflect the real needs on the ground (Bruegel, 2020).

#### **To achieve this, we recommend:**

- Have a **more holistic approach** towards climate change’s social consequences. First, new instruments can be developed to tackle more social consequences than is currently the case. For instance, new policies could focus more explicitly on inequalities related to access to work and the distribution of the benefits of the green transition (healthy food, clean technology, etc.) (Crespy & Munta, 2023). Furthermore, the common manner in which policymakers measure inequalities can also be adapted. This is important because collecting data contributes to creating awareness and in the end policies to address the identified issues (Hubert, 2023; Soler, 2023). Multidimensional, intersectional socio-economic characteristics need to be considered, including wealth, ethnic backgrounds and sexual orientation (Bruegel, 2018). Regarding gender, the EU’s climate policies have been called ‘gender blind’ by multiple authors (Allwood, 2021). A final recommendation would therefore be to make these policies more ‘gender-just’ by implementing gender mainstreaming.
- Have **more funding of the instruments** to reach the ambitious objectives; it must be clarified how enough funding will be provided in the long-term. More EU money is needed to ensure a just transition. If a substantial increase is politically unfeasible, other options could be to refocus the JTF on the EU regions and Member States which need it the most, or on the pillar of social support (Bruegel, 2020). A final element to consider is what the EU’s long-term fiscal strategy will be. While the JTF is in part financed by the Next Generation EU instrument (European Parliament, 2021), this could very well remain a one-off crisis measure (Watt, 2022). Questions thus emerge about where the money for the JTF will come from in the future.



- Increased **coordination at the EU level** to refocus the JTF on specific EU regions and Member States. In addition to the policy option of funnelling the funds towards the regions most in need, a more radical solution would be for the EU to distribute the money directly to the citizens. While this approach would in theory ensure a more just distribution of the budget, the EU currently lacks the treaty competences to put this into practice.

## Climate Change and Green Mobility

*The main objective of this section is to present the negative consequences of human action, in particular the issue of air pollution in urban areas and the issue of cross-border transport at European level, two issues that closely affect our everyday lives*

- Air pollution has emerged as a pressing challenge in urban areas across Europe, significantly impacting the health and well-being of residents. This text delves into the issue of air pollution in urban centres within the European Union (EU) and explores the initiatives undertaken to address this critical problem.
- Europe has set ambitious goals to enhance air quality, with the objective of achieving cleaner ambient air by 2030 and zero pollution by 2050. The proposed revision of the Ambient Air Quality Directives will align EU air quality standards more closely with the guidelines of the World Health Organization. These measures represent a significant stride towards improving the well-being of European citizens and propel the EU towards its ultimate target of achieving zero pollution air by 2050.
- Recognizing the need to combat air pollution, the European Union has taken important steps to address the issue. One of the key approaches has been the establishment of air quality standards, which set limits on pollutant concentrations to safeguard the well-being of citizens. Regular review and updates to these standards ensure their continued effectiveness in protecting public health.
- Furthermore, the EU has made efforts to promote the adoption of clean and sustainable transportation modes as a means to address air pollution.
- While commendable progress has been made, challenges persist in achieving comprehensive and impactful results. The existing EU emission limits fall short of the recommendations set by the World Health Organization (Sicard et al., 2021), necessitating further improvements in regulatory frameworks.
- To enhance air quality in urban areas we propose to establish an EU-wide Urban Air Quality Collaboration Network. Under the coordination of the EU, local governments, urban planners, and environmental experts from various cities could collaborate and exchange ideas on effective urban planning approaches that prioritise air quality.

### **To achieve this, we recommend:**

- Establish an **EU-wide Urban Air Quality Collaboration Network**. This network would facilitate the sharing of best practices, knowledge, and innovative strategies among different urban areas across the EU.

- Incentivize participating cities to implement **innovative urban planning strategies** through funding programs or grants. This would encourage cities to adopt progressive measures, such as low-emission zones, car-free city centres, and the integration of green infrastructure into urban landscapes
- **Empower urban areas** to implement effective air quality improvement measures while adapting them to their specific local contexts. This coordinated effort would create a network of cities committed to sustainable urban development, resulting in healthier and more livable urban environments across the EU.
- **Establishing a platform for information exchange and fostering collaboration** among policymakers, researchers, and industry stakeholders would facilitate the development of innovative solutions to combat air pollution.
- **Providing financial and technical support** to regions disproportionately affected by air pollution would help implement effective emissions reduction measures.
- **Greening and re-naturing cities** and the implementation of fresh air corridors can help meet air quality standards while also addressing social needs.
- The European railway is less of a network than it is a patchwork of national systems which lacks connection and cohesion. There is also a lack of available rolling stock poses a major challenge to ambitious targets for rail usage in the next decade.
- A common European market for exchanging redundant railway assets, as well as surpluses, could help reduce raw material expenditure and energy consumption. However, as ALLRAIL points out, there is a lack of standardised equipment, which means “even a small technical detail can lead to [elements] being incompatible and thus not suitable to be exchanged among countries.” Moreover, the rollout of such standardised equipment, such as the European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS), has been disappointingly slow.
- We recommend accelerating the **roll-out of ERTMS** to allow equal opportunities to rail operators, as well as to encourage use of standardised equipment that is more suitable to a circular economy.
- **Railway companies should launch a tendering process for rolling stock** to other companies, before stripping trains of all their parts.
- We encourage a “**European rolling stock pool**” - a mandatory period wherein operators **must advertise the sale of railway components**, taking measures to prevent their waste before they are permitted to re-use, recycle, or dispose of them.
- **We encourage the EU to promote the deployment of gauge-adaptable technology**, used by European companies such as Talgo (ES) and Swiss Golden Pass Express.
- The EU should promote the **deployment of gauge-adaptable technology**.
- This could be partially achieved through the recognition of cross-border rail as an **Important Project of Common European Interest (IPCEI)**, which falls under State Aid rules, to allow the European institutions to investigate how, for example, InvestEU funds could be allocated to boost the development of these technologies.

- The EU should promote use of a *lingua franca* for EU railways. The revision of Directive 2007/59/EC in part underlines the existing obligation for cross-border train drivers to speak B1-level English, but this is regarded as an administrative hurdle by national rail authorities. The Culture and Education Committee, in collaboration with the Commission DG EAC, should **explore avenues for funding English lessons for all rail staff**, or the development of an online programme or application which would teach specific technical terms.
- Explore venues for **funding English lessons for all rail staff**, or the development of an online programme or application which would teach specific technical terms.

## EU and Nature

*The main objective of this section is to investigate the effect on nature, how our actions have led to the natural disasters we are unfortunately witnessing in recent years and wondering how to face them. Moreover, we will discuss solutions to change our relationship with nature.*

### Rise of natural disasters

#### 1. EU facing natural disasters

- According to the European Environment Agency (EEA), the frequency and consequences of disasters in Europe are on the rise. This increase in losses can largely be attributed to heightened human activity and the concentration of economic assets in areas prone to hazards. While it is currently challenging to precisely determine the proportion of losses directly caused by climate change, it is expected to escalate in the coming years due to the projected increase in frequency and intensity of extreme weather.
- The EU Civil Protection Mechanism was established by the European Commission in October 2001. Its primary objective is to enhance collaboration among EU countries and nine participating states (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, Turkey, and Ukraine) in the field of civil protection. The Mechanism aims to strengthen prevention, preparedness, and response to disasters. When a request for assistance is made through the Mechanism, the Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) activates resources and expertise to provide the necessary support.
- The European Civil Protection Pool and RescEU should be generalised and have more resources. Even if the EU adds more tools to strengthen the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, the EU needs to merge everything and have an EU Civil Protection Disaster Corps (CPDC), with European civil servant staff. The EU Civil Protection needs more EU civil staff and equipment, the EU is mainly leading a coordination based on EU member states and participating states offering assistance. The EU should not only evaluate the action but lead the action with EU staff and materials. The EU also increased funds regarding responding to major natural disasters and facilitated European solidarity with disaster-stricken regions within Europe.

- The EU's civil protection mechanism is being bolstered by the support of Copernicus. Copernicus, a satellite mapping service, plays a crucial role in identifying disaster-stricken areas and determining the nature and scale of their impact. This valuable information allows for the effective planning of relief operations and aid distribution.

## 2. More EU integration to protect EU citizens

European Neighborhood countries must be part of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism. EU Member states and ENP countries participation in the EU Civil Protection is essential because the disaster will increase and the EU to protect its territory has no choice but to work jointly with its neighbour.

While the EERC in Brussels serves as the central hub for operations, certain measures are more effectively handled at the household or municipal level. For instance, enhancing natural drainage systems to mitigate pluvial flooding or ensuring proper care and housing for elderly individuals to alleviate the impact of heat waves are best managed locally. In this regard, decentralisation is needed with EU Offices in the sensible areas where EU civil protection experts will be established.

The EU Civil Protection must maintain the collaborative spirit of Team Europe demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Team Europe's response to COVID-19 provided substantial support, amounting to €53.7 billion, to over 140 partner countries. Initially, the financial commitment stood at around €20 billion, combining resources from the EU, its Member States, and financial institutions like the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. By January 2021, this commitment had doubled to €40.5 billion. Subsequently, by April 2021, it had further increased to €46 billion, ultimately reaching €53.7 billion by the end of 2021.

We discussed how to face natural disasters caused by climate change and biodiversity loss, disasters that human activity provoked. To face these disasters, we need more than coordination, we need more European integration. Nature is not only a problem, but it could also be part of the solution.

### To achieve this, we recommend:

- Have an **EU Civil Protection Disaster Corps (CPDC)**, with European civil servant staff. The European Civil Protection Pool and RescEU should be generalised and have more resources. The EU should not only evaluate the action but lead the action with EU staff and materials.
- **Increased funds** for responding to major natural disasters and facilitated European solidarity with disaster-stricken regions within Europe.
- Have all the **European Neighborhood countries as participating countries** to the EU Civil Protection Mechanism.
- **Decentralise the Emergency Response Coordination Centre** with EU Offices in the sensible areas where EU civil protection experts will be established.
- Maintain the collaborative **spirit of Team Europe** demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic for EU Civil Protection.

## Beneficial relationships with Nature

### 1. Nature is the solution

- Nature-based solutions (NbS) utilise the potential of healthy ecosystems and natural processes to optimise infrastructure and promote a stable and diverse future. They play a vital role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and helping us adapt to the impacts of climate change. The World Bank and IUCN introduced the concept of NbS in the late 2000s to emphasise the significance of conserving biodiversity for climate change mitigation and adaptation. Although the definition of NbS has evolved over time, the IUCN's definition is widely recognized. NbS are “actions to protect, sustainably manage and restore natural or modified ecosystems that address societal challenges effectively and adaptively, simultaneously providing human well-being and biodiversity benefits.”
- Several ecosystem-based concepts fit under the NbS umbrella categorised as production, restoration (eg. Forest landscape restoration), infrastructure-based (e.g Integrated Coastal Zone Management) or issue-specific (eg. Eco-Disaster Risk Reduction) concepts.
- The three core dimensions of NbS are societal challenges, biodiversity net gain and co benefits for human well-being, if an action is not designed to address these elements concurrently, it will not be considered as a NbS approach.
- At the G7 Summit in Biarritz, G7 leaders adopted the Metz Charter on Biodiversity and the Leaders’ Pledge for Nature. It recognizes the role of NbS to achieve the SDGs and deliver multiple benefits.
- NbS has been included for the first time in a COP 27 decision, the Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan regarding Forest.  
*Encourages Parties to consider, as appropriate, nature-based solutions or ecosystem-based approaches, taking into consideration United Nations Environment Assembly resolution 5/5,31 for their mitigation and adaptation action while ensuring relevant social and environmental safeguards*
- At COP15, one of the main agreements of the Global biodiversity framework is to tackle climate change through nature-based solutions.
- The European Commission highlighted that implementing Green Infrastructure and working with nature in an urban environment, for example by “incorporating biodiversity-rich parks, green spaces and fresh air corridors, can help mitigate the urban heat island effect.”<sup>[1]</sup> For the European Commission with Green Infrastructure, we could be able “to understand the value of the benefits that nature provides to human society and to mobilise investments to sustain and enhance them.” Furthermore, the European Commission explains that NbS offered by green infrastructure can play a crucial role in effectively implementing policies that aim to achieve some or all of their desired objectives.
- On December 11th 2019, the European Commission with the European Green deal mentioned that a new, more ambitious EU strategy on adaptation to climate change will be adopted. The European Commission added that “work on climate adaptation should

continue to influence public and private investments, including on nature-based solutions.”

- Also, the European Green Deal communication explained that a Farm to Fork Strategy will support the common fisheries policy to reduce the impact of fisheries on ecosystems by supporting more connected and well-managed marine protected areas
- On December 19<sup>th</sup> 2019, Council of the EU agreed on a conclusion related to the preparation of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework of the CBD. The Council stressed the need of using NbS based on UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Special Reports regarding biodiversity protection, restoration and sustainable use, and climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- Regarding NbS, the EU Biodiversity strategy gave details on NbS actions and scope. We can see this clearly with the following statement:  
*“The biodiversity crisis and the climate crisis are intrinsically linked. Climate change accelerates the destruction of the natural world through droughts, flooding and wildfires, while the loss and unsustainable use of nature are in turn key drivers of climate change. But just as the crises are linked, so are the solutions. Nature is a vital ally in the fight against climate change. Nature regulates the climate, and nature-based solutions, such as protecting and restoring wetlands, peatlands and coastal ecosystems, or sustainably managing marine areas, forests, grasslands and agricultural soils, will be essential for emission reduction and climate adaptation. Planting trees and deploying green infrastructure will help us to cool urban areas and mitigate the impact of natural disasters.”*
- As promised in the Biodiversity Strategy, the European Commission proposed a regulation on nature restoration known as the Natural Restoration law “to contribute to the continuous, long term and sustained recovery of bio diverse and resilient nature across the Union’s land and sea areas through the restoration of ecosystems, habitats and species and to contribute to achieving Union climate mitigation and climate adaptation objectives and to meeting EU international commitments.” The specific objective of the nature restoration law is to “restore degraded ecosystems across the EU to good condition by 2050, and put them on the path to recovery by 2030. Once restored, ecosystems should be maintained in good condition.” To realise this objective, the nature restoration law proposed first to set up binding goals for the restoration and preservation of ecosystems to ensure their good condition. Secondly, to establish a framework to ensure effective implementation, with requirements to the Member States to conduct assessments and develop a National Restoration Plan. In addition, reporting and review will be asked.

## **2. Nature-based solutions is more than a concept**

- We can see that the NbS is now established at the international level and promoted by the EU. Unfortunately, on the ground, there are not enough NbS projects, the biodiversity strategy led to a change of their way of working and process in the elaboration of the project, but it is mainly a change in terms of wording. The project managers don’t really care about the concept, but they need to adapt their usual proposals with new key words. NbS is a new concept with a new framework from actions that already exist in the past. The EU has supported the NbS for a long time, but it was not called NbS. Different formulations were used and the concept of NbS acting more as a brand. Even if the NbS concept is quite recent, the activities related to NbS are not recent at all.

- The concept of NbS is a global trend to support more environment activities and help to harmonise the practices. The NbS concept is helpful for communication, it will remain over time. The EU has a huge lack in terms of communicating directly with the local authorities. For example, the recommendations made by Interreg regarding NbS projects are only seen by EU officials, but this knowledge could be useful to every local authority. The EU needs to lead that NbS project implementations are not only label projects but also projects with a concrete ecological impact to fight biodiversity loss and climate change. That's why, the EU needs to be closer to the municipalities, civil societies organisations and main actors in the field to implement NbS projects.
- An EU Nature-based solutions platform could be put in place for the NGOs, Civil societies organisations and the local authorities. This platform could give them the opportunities to submit a NbS project and be connected to EU experts. The platform could support them to access finance and capacity building. An Interreg academia for local authority could be a good idea to share NbS knowledge and practices.
- The NbS should be mainstream in all the EU institutions. The EU needs to concentrate not only on promoting NbS or financing research and development on this topic. The EU needs to push the Member state and the private sector to use NbS. Natural restoration law proposal is a good start, but the EU member states need to accept the Natural restoration law and respect it. The European People's Party (EPP), which holds the majority in Parliament are in opposition to the law, arguing that it would have a significant impact on agricultural land through renaturation efforts, thereby jeopardising food security in Europe.
- The EU shouldn't only check on the Member states. The EU as an environmental global leader doesn't succeed in pushing nature-based solutions at national, regional and international levels. For the moment, it's an umbrella concept only. The harmonisation of the MS in terms of restoring and protecting the ecosystem is not efficient. The local authorities and the EU don't have enough synergies to tackle the problem on the ground. Regarding the preservation, restoration and conservation of the ecosystems, the EU needs a concrete and efficient European neighbourhood policy and new international bodies.
- Moreover, the EU must launch major NbS projects under Team Europe Initiative. Team Europe was initially put in place to ensure a coordinated and comprehensive response between the EU and its Member States to the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences. Team Europe consists of the EU, EU Member States including their implementing agencies and public development banks as well as the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD).
- Now, the EU in the narrative promotes NbS but in action the EU has a market-based approach and keeps a voluntary corporate responsibility. The EU continues to believe that economic growth is the solution to tackle environmental problems. EU Trade agreements such as the EU-Mercosur are not taking into consideration the environment and don't engage the economical actors to NbS. It is even the opposite; the EU opens the doors to exportation of agricultural products to the EU without consideration of the ecosystem and the necessity to increase the local supply chains.
- 80% of Europe's ecosystems worth protecting are currently in poor condition.<sup>1</sup> The EU should push to establish a coercive and supreme authority to control the human instinct to

consume ecological space. The EU needs to pledge for an International Court for Nature, where the companies and states could be judged if they don't respect or act for the success of the multilateral environmental agreements. The integration of Nature in all sectors needs to be mainstream around the world by the EU and integrated inside the EU without binding actions, the nature integration will be complicated.

- The EU should follow more bio-environmentalists solutions by doing reforms to protect nature from humanity. We need to respect nature by designing a new economy based on an ethic of sustainability, one that operates at a steady state, designed to preserve the globe's natural heritage. We need a strong EU to push the states and the private sector to integrate NbS to protect, restore and conserve our ecosystems.
- We have no choice but to adapt ourselves to the natural disaster and change our relationship with nature, the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) explains that "the planet is nearing catastrophic levels of heating and immediate, radical action is required. Governments around the world have seven years to half greenhouse gas emissions to avoid irreversible change."

#### **To achieve this, we recommend:**

- Doing more than promoting the concept of Nature-based solutions (NbS), the EU needs to push the **implementation of NbS projects**.
- Launching more NbS projects under **Team Europe Initiative**
- Establishing a **EU Nature-based solutions platform** for the NGOs, Civil societies organisations and the local authorities. This platform could give them the opportunities to submit a NbS project and be connected to EU experts. The mechanism could support them to access finance and capacity building.
- Having an **Interreg academia for local authority** could be a good idea to share NbS knowledge and practices directly to the municipalities.
- Have a **strong Natural restoration law** that conduct the Member states and the private sector to use NbS
- Establishing a coercive and supreme authority to control the human instinct to consume ecological space. The EU needs to **pledge for an International Court for Nature**, where the companies and states could be judged if they don't respect or act for the success of the multilateral environmental agreements.

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# Policy Recommendations by Working Group on Economic Resilience, Digital Transformation and Welfare

*Working Group Members: Richard Cunningham, Roberta Guevska, Jade Somoreau (facilitator), Víctor Arribas, João Manuel Paiva, Katherine Jeffery, Paula Agudelo (facilitator).*

Focusing specifically on two main legislative recent proposals and legislative debates animating the EU institutions (Chips Act and Artificial Intelligence Act), we tried to draw a critical analysis of the limits of the digital economy we are heading to in terms of social progress (data protection, unequal access and knowledge of digital tools, national security breaches), the compatibility with the growth roadmap dressed by Ursula von der Leyen (digital pollution, cooling of data centers, lack of human contact with natural environment), and the resilience aspect of the economy (crisis cycles, banks interdependencies etc).

## The industrial and digital transformation

The 2030 Digital Compass was presented on 9 March 2021 by the Commission and aims to provide a vision for Europe's digital transformation by 2030. On 14 July 2022, the Commission welcomed the political agreement reached by the European Parliament and the Council of the EU on the 2030 Policy Programme "Path to the Digital Decade". The aim of this programme is to set up a monitoring and cooperation mechanism to achieve the common objectives and targets of Europe's digital transformation as set out in the 2030 Digital Compass.

### **To achieve this:**

**Digital Skills:** The Digital Decade Strategy shall build a solid and standardized foundation of digital skills as lifelong learning for all – digital skills should be universal, inclusive and accessible for all learners, irrespective of their backgrounds and career interests. Courses need to be designed in an interactive and visual manner to increase interest and motivation. Moreover, it shall encourage companies to support the reskilling and upskilling of diverse candidates with training programmes in underrepresented fields (i.e, encouraging women into STEM, further supporting black and minority ethnic groups into high-skilled roles, and creating opportunities for low-skilled young people).

**Digital Infrastructure:** Next-generation and secure connectivity for everyone across Europe is required for businesses and citizens to fully participate in and benefit from our digital society. The rollout of 5G, powered by fibre, gigabit-capable networks and enhanced Wi-Fi capacity, is one of the critical building blocks for our economy and society. In addition, cloud computing is critical to the successful deployment of artificial intelligence, IoT, blockchain and a myriad of other innovative technologies.

**Digital transformation of business:** The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of and accelerated our use of digital technologies in the way we work, communicate and collaborate with colleagues and operate our businesses. This momentum must not be lost, but rather, Europe should continue to accelerate investment, innovation and entrepreneurship to help new technologies scale up as we build a more resilient and sustainable economy towards 2030. The most promising technologies (e.g. Artificial intelligence, blockchain, 5G, data and cloud infrastructures, IoT, robotic process automation, and cybersecurity strategies) have tremendous economic and social potential and can change the way we develop and use certain products and services. Europe must also take every possible measure to enable its entrepreneurs and start-ups to scale up in Europe. Here, EU leaders have a role to play to create a stable, predictable, and supportive regulatory environment for entrepreneurs and investors.

**Digitalisation of public services:** COVID-19 also accelerated the adoption of emerging technologies within the public sector, such as video conferencing, Robotic Process Automation (RPA) and AI-powered technologies, to help provide digital public services, enable remote working, and support employees managing high-volume workloads. Emerging technologies helped with managing increased data processing, medicine reporting, and processing of unemployment benefits with speed and accuracy. RPA and AI implementations increased internal operations' resilience by overcoming challenges posed by insufficient digital distribution channels and bureaucratic processes. Increasing the uptake of emerging technologies will be essential for enabling a faster, digital, public administration and a more resilient economic recovery.

**International partnership to boost the accomplishment of DDS targets:** The US and Europe are each other's most important commercial partners when it comes to digitally enabled services. The US exported \$167 billion in digitally enabled services to the EU in 2019, while the EU exported \$130 billion to the US. Therefore, for Europe's digital decade to be successful, it will need to build strong international partnerships, as no single country or region can solve collective problems independently.

## Re-thinking a resilient European economy: views on semiconductors

Given that semiconductor chips are now a vital piece of technology throughout our daily lives, there remains an ongoing shortage of chips and domestic chip production in the EU. According to the European Commission, in light of the current and futures wave of technology development, including artificial intelligence, cloud computing, 5G, to supercomputing, the [European Chips Act](#) (ECA) is “a comprehensive set of measures to ensure the EU's security of supply, resilience and technological leadership in semiconductor technologies and applications”.

The European Commission has set-out its core objective to enable the EU to double its current semiconductor chips market share from 9% to 20% by 2030. By sourcing an initial €11 billion in

funding for research, design, and production from EU initiatives such as Horizon Europe and Next Generation EU, the goal is to mobilise more than €43 billion of public and private investments by 2030.

Semiconductors are at the centre of strong geopolitical interests. For example, in August 2020, China announced that it aims to produce 70% of all chips it uses by 2025. In May 2021, Korea unveiled a €450 billion plan to strengthen its chip sector. In February 2021, days before the European Commission announced the European Chips Act, the US published a €45 billion package to support US chip making production.

**To achieve this:**

- Our initial proposals call for a **reassessment of the European Chips Act** as part of a new industrial strategy for Europe and to ensure equal access not only to digital means but more equal and greater access to digital **opportunities, resources and knowledge for SME's and citizens**. Further investment is required to reach businesses and citizens which could be allocated through the Digital Europe programme as the programme is directly targeted towards small and medium-sized enterprises.
- Currently, according to Article 3 of the Chips Act, the Initiative is established for the duration of the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027. Yet, if it is successful the legislation shall be extended over this time period. **An extension under the Multiannual Financial Framework 2028-2034 is required**. The period until the end of the current MFF in 2027 is not sufficient to achieve the objectives set out in the ECA itself. An extension should already be laid down here. Also, **he financial envelope proposed for the ECA, as proposed currently, could be increased**, to ensure the overall package is sufficient for the EU to compete on the international market and establish new production facilities. The ECA could be provided with new financial resources, beyond the mere re-directing of funds from successful programmes, such as Horizon Europe and the Digital Europe Programme, which would not be sufficient to achieve and implement the European Commission current targets for the ECA.
- The **European Semiconductor Board that is to be established according to ECA, could be composed of representatives of the Member States with the appropriate professional competence and shall be chaired by a representative of the Commission**. That means that the Semiconductor Board should be a specialised body and not a purely political body. As recommended by the Committee of the Regions in late 2022, given their role in supporting regional industrial ecosystems, including SMEs, as well as science and research, regions with relevant semiconductor ecosystems (e.g., the members of Silicon Europe) and the European Committee of the Regions should be involved in the work of the Board.
- In addition to securing the supply of critical raw materials, the **full potential of the circular economy should be harnessed**. The recovery of raw materials and materials from devices and installations is essential. This must already be taken into account when developing products using semiconductors. The EU's disadvantage compared to third countries in terms of natural resources makes the EU heavily dependent on non-EU

suppliers for imports of critical raw materials. Therefore, the European Commission should address this strategic dependency by intensifying its work and requirements on chips circularity, notably in the design and re-use of material, and to further deepen the EU's trade relations with key international partners.

- Considering current events, **it is important that the semiconductor industry has a secure energy supply.** This concerns, in particular, the necessary quantities of electricity and grid stability; these are a factor in the choice of location for existing installations but, above all, for setting up new ones. In that sense, businesses should take greater account of their semiconductor needs and the necessary supply chains in an evolving geostrategic environment and avoid one-sided dependencies to spread risks.

## Citizens protection, equal opportunities and reduced inequalities

The uptake of Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems has a strong potential to bring societal benefits, economic growth and enhance EU innovation and global competitiveness. At the same time, it is commonly acknowledged that the specific characteristics of certain AI systems raise some concerns especially with regard to safety, security and fundamental rights protection. Against this background, the European Commission unveiled a proposal for a new Artificial Intelligence Act (AI Act) in April 2021. The Commission proposes to enshrine in EU law a technology-neutral definition of AI systems. The Commission proposes as well to adopt different set of rules tailored on a risk-based approach with four levels of risks:

### To achieve this:

- **Equal access to the internet for all Europeans:** access to the internet across the EU is necessary to reduce sustained inequalities and overcome common obstacles of citizens to access critical internet resources. Building on the outcome of the Conference on the Future of Europe, equal access to the internet must be enshrined as a fundamental right of each EU citizen (proposal 31). This should coincide with the commitment and action to ensure that citizens of rural and remote areas across the EU, perhaps by categorizing EU territory according to their level of internet connectedness and ensure stable and reliable access to the internet according to each zones respective needs.
- **Provision of equal opportunities in digitalisation for all EU citizens:** EU citizens, particularly those in the most vulnerable age groups such as children and the elderly and those living in more remote areas, should have the opportunities to formal and non-formal digital literacy educational training to ensure that nobody is left behind while helping to overcome the persistent digital inequalities. This could be supplemented by the citizens Conference on the Future of Europe final report proposal of an EU “EU certification relating to digital skills in schools that will prepare young people for the future job market (Proposal 31.4 - ECP1 recommendation no. 8)”. Also those more elderly could be given more opportunities to digital training and opportunity, for example post-retirement under



current EU schemes such as the Erasmus+ programme, the creation of other initiatives at EU level or increasing the MFF budget to increase funds to enable member states to provide such digital education resources.

- AI Act shall **preview the deployment of any AI system that poses an ‘unacceptable risk’ possible only in exceptional circumstances where it passes a ‘reinforced proportionality test’**. One should recognise the concerns that have been raised that the breadth of exceptions to prohibited AI systems could potentially lead to extensive use of biometric technologies. EDPB and EDPS, as well as numerous civil society organisations, have put forward persuasive arguments in favour of complete bans on any use of AI for automated recognition of human features in publicly accessible spaces, in any context. Should a ban not be adopted, one could suggest implementing a clearer, more comprehensive system to ensure that the use of these systems is limited, thoroughly considered, authorised by a public body and proportionate.
  - **To accomplish that:** Introduce, in Article 5 of the proposed Act, a ‘reinforced proportionality’ test, which goes beyond the risks to individual human rights, health and safety to also address societal and environmental harms, and to make any deployment of ‘unacceptable risk’ AI systems in exceptional circumstances conditional to passing the test.
- **The legislation also shall include an obligation to publish all decisions that approve the placing on the market or deployment of unacceptable risk systems in exceptional circumstances.** Public trust in AI is crucial for its uptake and success. Because the Act identifies certain forms of AI as posing unacceptable risks, it will be essential for the public to be able to scrutinise the justification for any specific instances of use to maintain trust in the regulation. This would require an obligation to publish all decisions about marketing and deploying prohibited AI systems, except any information that is legitimately confidential under relevant domestic or European law.
  - **To accomplish that:** Make public every decision about the deployment or marketing of any AI system that is categorised as posing an unacceptable risk, to ensure transparency about these decisions and allow the public access to them.
- **Human-centric AI development:** Human-centricity is at the heart of the emergent European Commission approach to AI. This implies not only attention to individuals but also to the well-being of the natural environment and society in general.
- **Social inclusion.** Developers of consumer-facing AI systems should be responsible for ensuring that such systems can be used by all intended users and do not lead to the social exclusion of those with disabilities.