European Universities Community

The voice of European students

ACTION 2

Inaugural Session of the European Student Assembly

3-4 March 2022, Strasbourg
Handbook

euc-initiative.com

PROJECT

The inaugural session of the European Student Assembly - What is it?

The inaugural session of the **European Student Assembly** will bring together student representatives designated in all 41 European university alliances (EUAs), for a conference to be held at the European parliament in Strasbourg on March 4th, 2022. This inaugural session will be the first of a series of gatherings that will give students a public voice in the European Union.

The main objectives are the following:

- Voicing the opinion of students in the Conference on the Future of Europe
- Fostering the participation of students within EUAs
- Reinforcing collaboration between different EUAs
- Increasing the impact and visibility of the EUAs initiative
- Laying the foundations of a long-term initiative to increase the participation of youth in the European democratic process

**More information on
www.euc-initiative.com**

CONTEXT

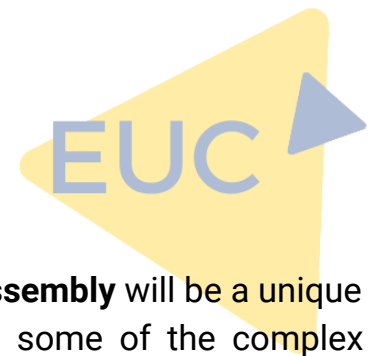## The inaugural session of the European Student Assembly - Where does it come from?

The **Conference on the Future of Europe** was launched jointly by the European Parliament, the European Council and the European Commission on Europe Day 2021, in Strasbourg. This initiative allows citizens and organisations all over Europe to express recommendations on the future of the Union. By spring 2022, the Conference is expected to reach conclusions and provide guidance on the future of Europe.

Strongly determined to collectively contribute to this endeavour, French members of European University Alliances have launched the **European Universities Community (EUC)**, a grassroots initiative that will allow universities across the Union to collectively voice their positions on the future of the EU and to promote the debate among their respective student bodies. Student representatives have been associated with the project since its very beginning. They are expected to play a major role in its design and implementation.

Conference on the **Future** of **Europe**

For more information:
www.futureu.europa.eu

As one of the main EUC activities, the **European Student Assembly** will be a unique opportunity for students from across Europe to address some of the complex challenges that the EU faces today. The Assembly will contribute to **make student voices heard** through the publication of their policy recommendations.
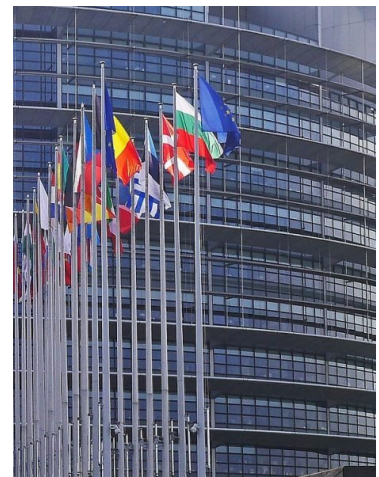
HOW WILL IT WORK?

Step 1 - Documentation work and students' consultation

During the preparation phase, students from all alliances will be invited to debate and design solutions on a series of contemporary issues related to the four main topics defined by the Commission in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe. Students will have to look for the appropriate documentation and to consult their peers on the topic they have been assigned to. They will find useful material in the contributions submitted by the EUC on the online platform of the Conference on the Future of Europe. These discussions between students will be run in a manner to be defined by each university. They will result in the writing of recommendations to be voiced during the plenary meeting by students' representatives.

Step 2 - Plenary meeting

The plenary meeting is expected to gather around **200 student representatives** from all participating alliances in the Strasbourg premises of the European Parliament.

After a series of keynote speeches, student representatives will be given the opportunity to discuss their position within one of 9 thematic sub-groups. The recommendations of each subgroup will then be submitted to the vote of the plenary assembly, resulting in a common position paper to be shared with European decision makers in the frame of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

DEBATING TOPICS

VALUES, RIGHTS, RULE OF LAW, DEMOCRACY, SECURITY

1. How can the EU reunite its people around its common values?

According to Article 2 of the Treaty on the European Union, the Union is founded on the core values of human dignity, freedom, democracy, rule of law, equality, and respect for human rights. Even though these values are broadly uncontested, they should not be taken for granted.

Populist parties and extremist movements gain traction across member states and try to undermine the EU's founding principles. In addition, current challenges like global change, geopolitical instability and economic recovery put the EU under pressure and require the identity of the European project to be reconsidered.

How can the EU defend its core values against these contestations, including anti-democratic ones? Can they help revive the European spirit in light of the key political challenges ahead?

2. How can the European Union become more resilient to cyber attacks?

Digital networks are not only part of our daily lives, they also have turned into a building block in key sectors of society such as health, politics, banking or transportation. The Internet is crucial for the functioning of these IT systems whilst also making our society more vulnerable to new kinds of attacks. Cyber criminality has thus turned into a pressing concern for private individuals, as well as big companies and public institutions.

How can the European Union create a framework to improve the resilience of all these actors to cybersecurity threats? The panel shall also contribute to a strategic consideration: how can the EU take an position promoting security in the digital space, shielding its assets, and protecting its people?

3. Learning from the pandemic - Do we need a European Health Union?

After a rather rough start, EU Member States have been able to act together in response to the ongoing unprecedented Covid 19 crisis. This was particularly the case in the purchase of vaccine doses. Yet, as it stands, the European Union only has a supporting competence in the field of health, so that it can merely assist Member States in the coordination of their national policies.

The panel shall therefore focus on the future of EU action in the field of social and health policy considering future crises. In other words: is the current legal framework sufficient or should Member States increase the Union's competences in this area? What would feasible reform options be that withstand partisan divide?

4. Agriculture vs. Sustainability - What CAP for the future?

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has been one of the key policies of European integration since the beginning of the European communities. Pursuing a market logic, the common agricultural policy was first conceived in relation to the competition policy and the achievement of the internal market and was thus taking into account environmental issues only incidentally.

Now, faced with the ongoing climate and environmental crisis, the European Union has declared it is ready to change course in order to make the CAP "greener". The panel shall therefore discuss the direction in which the CAP should be restructured. In other words: can farm profitability be compatible with environmental protection? How can the EU reform its agricultural policies to fit diverging needs across its member States?

5. Sustainable development or degrowth - What economic model can the EU adopt for tomorrow's world and how can it be durably settled?

First designed as a common economic market with peace, recovery and growth as primary objectives, the European Union has been facing a slowdown in economic growth for several decades. The European Green Deal projects to transform the EU into a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy, leaving no one behind. At the same time, rising concerns about global change and environmental damages put into question our current economic model.

The panel shall therefore discuss the current and future EU's economic strategy. Should it remain the same after the pandemic? How can it fit the young generation's aspirations? What can the EU do to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs?

6. Re-thinking democratic engagement in the digital age: How should the European democracy of tomorrow look like?

The turnout of 50.4% in the 2019 European elections was driven by a strong rise in participation of the young electorate between 18 and 39. Nevertheless, the participation of young people remains an issue for most elections. Simultaneously, thousands of young people have marched accross Europe's streets as part of the "Fridays for Future" demonstration to call for stronger climate action. This draws a contrasted picture of a politicised youth that is rather dissatisfied with party democracy and the results it achieves. Across Europe, alternative forms of deliberative democratic engagement have been experimented. Digitalisation creates a plethora of new possibilities. So, it is time to ask young Europeans : How do you envision the democracy and political participation within the EU in the future?

7. Social media: opportunities and threats - How can the EU regulate digital platforms without limiting freedom of speech and free exchange of thoughts?

48% of individuals in the EU use social networks every day or almost every day (2019). Private as well as public communication cannot be thought of without social media. The Internets connects and informs, but it can also divide and polarise. The riots at the US Capitol are a recent example demonstrating the destructive force of social media.

Without doubt, disinformation and hate speech have turned into major threats to contemporary democracy. As a result, the EU has started to regulate online platforms while trying to safeguard freedom of speech. Let's ask the new generation of digital natives: what could, and should the EU do to avoid the manipulation of public opinion? Is there a risk of jeopardising freedom of expression? How should the enormous power of social media companies be dealt with?

8. How should the EU position itself in a globalized world, vis-à-vis other actors such as the US, China, or Russia, and with regard to conflicts in its neighbourhood?

The world's political situation and the international environment in which Europe finds itself have changed dramatically over the last two decades. The People's Republic of China, following years of unprecedented economic growth, has developed new views on the world.

The United States of America's role in the world might be changing, with possible implications for the transatlantic alliance. Russia as a key neighbour of the European Union has developed new strategies of foreign policy. Several conflicts are present in Europe's neighbouring regions.

In this changing and dynamic world, how should the European Union position itself? Which foreign policies can and should it pursue? What should be its priorities?

9. Climate refugees as a new challenge for Europe - How should the European Union prepare to deal with refugee crises to come?

Recent and recurring events such as droughts, wildfires and floods in Europe and elsewhere have raised major concerns about the consequences of climate change on populations. Already accounting for half of international migrants, climate refugees are likely to increase dramatically.

In the absence of a legal statute, people being displaced due to natural disasters enjoy little protection under international law. The European continent might have to face internal migrations as well as migrations from and to other world regions. Past refugee crises have stressed the pressing need for increased cooperation between European countries. How can the European Union prepare for this foreseeable crisis?

JOIN US NOW!

Applicants need to submit this form by Nov. 14, 2021.

Students from all disciplines and academic cycles are eligible, from Bachelor to PhD. Each participating university will select two students who will foster debate within their community, gather the opinions of their fellow students and represent them during the plenary meeting in Strasbourg. The selection process is open to students from European University Alliances only. The organisation team will ensure the fairest distribution of gender, nationality, country of residence, level, and academic discipline among subgroups. Students' choice of topics will be taken into account as much as possible.

WHO WE ARE

A collective body composed of students from different European university alliances, the EUC Action 2 **Steering Committee** was set up to design the main features of the European Student Assembly and to coordinate its implementation, with the support of administrative staff and faculty members. This body meets once a week and exchanges regularly via the Discord server established for this purpose.

THE ORGANISATION TEAM

Students	University	Alliance
Elena Schulz-Ruhtenberg	Sciences Po	CIVICA
Reem Al-Ameri	Sciences Po	CIVICA
Léonard Colomba-Petteng	Sciences Po	CIVICA
Julia Burchett	Université Libre de Bruxelles	CIVIS
Emil Răducanu	CY Cergy Paris Université	EUTOPIA
Islam Shalik	Université Grenoble-Alpes	UNITE!

Academic staff	University	Alliance
Constance Chevallier-Govers	Université Grenoble Alpes	UNITE !
Frank Stadelmaier	Sciences Po	CIVICA
Fanny Dubray	Sciences Po	CIVICA

For further information, please contact:
- Elena SCHULZ-RUHTENBERG: elena.schulzruhtenberg@sciencespo.fr
- Constance CHEVALLIER-GOVERS: constance.chevallier-govers@univ-grenoble-alpes.fr
- Khaldia CHOUAT: khaldia.chouat@grenoble-inp.fr

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