

European
Universities
Community

The voice of European Students

#ESA23
2nd Edition



EUROPEAN STUDENT ASSEMBLY

SECOND EDITION - 2023

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Think before you print.

PROJECT

What is the European Student Assembly?

The **European Student Assembly (ESA)** is a grassroots project that gathers each year more than 200 students from most of the European University Alliances (EUA) to debate current issues, draft political recommendations for the future of Europe and advocate them among stakeholders and decision makers. One of the flagship projects of the European Universities Community (EUC), the ESA is entirely designed and implemented by **a steering committee composed of students, academic and non academic staff members** from different higher education institutions in Europe.

Objectives

- **Voicing the opinion of EUA students** from different countries, backgrounds, fields and levels of study, all recruited for their engagement and motivation.
- **Fostering the participation of students within EUAs** while reinforcing collaboration between them and increasing the impact and visibility of the EUA initiative.
- **Advocating deliberative processes** as a way to regenerate European democracy and to reduce the gap between citizens and decision makers.
- **Encourage students to get involved in European politics** at local, national and European level and increase their participation in European democratic processes.

Expected outcomes

The participants of the ESA 2023 will produce a **collection of recommendations on 10 debating topics**.

The Assembly itself will be followed by a series of **dissemination events gathering stakeholders and decision makers** where students will advocate and disseminate their recommendations among various actors such as municipalities, companies, NGOs, who are active at different levels of the European political life.

Debating topics *(detailed from page 11 onwards)*

- Panel 1 - **Deliberative versus representative democracy?** How to reduce the gap between citizens and policy-makers and create a more united Europe?
- Panel 2 - **Lessons from the past.** How could the French-German history of reconciliation serve as a model to overcome conflicts and build unity?
- Panel 3 - **Energy!** How to secure fair and sustainable access to energy in Europe at different levels?
- Panel 4 - **From farm to fork.** How can local food distribution channels contribute to a fairer and more sustainable European food system?
- Panel 5 - **Taking better care of each other.** What should be the European approach to mental health?
- Panel 6 - How to ensure a fair and sustainable digital transition in a context of exploding demand and raw material scarcity?
- Panel 7 - Is the EU in a position to develop an efficient foreign policy and an autonomous defence policy that would ensure the security of its citizens?
- Panel 8 - **Cities of the future.** How could sustainable cities contribute in European autonomy and people welfare?
- Panel 9 - **Excellence versus inclusion?** How can European higher education institutions offer a more inclusive access to skills and knowledge?
- Panel 10 - **European Year of Skills** - What role can higher education institutions play in reducing the skills gap in Europe?

CONTEXT

From the Conference on the Future of Europe...

Jointly organised by students and faculty members, the inaugural session of the European Student Assembly gathered **275 students from 38 alliances and 29 countries** in Strasbourg in March 2022.

The initiative took place in the context of the **Conference on the Future of Europe** (CoFoE) launched jointly by the European Parliament, the European Council and the European Commission on Europe Day 2021, in Strasbourg. The CoFoE was meant for citizens and organisations all over Europe to express recommendations on the future of the Union. The ESA participants debated and produced 89 policy proposals that were submitted on the platform of the CoFoE and discussed with Members of the European Parliament, representatives from the European Commission and other stakeholders.

...to #ESA23

EUC is now launching the **second edition of the European Student Assembly** that will bring together 240 students from 44 European university alliances to discuss topics directly connected with the future of Europe and design joint recommendations. This several months project will culminate with a deliberative Assembly gathering **at the European Parliament** in Strasbourg **from 31 May 2023 to 2 June 2023**. Dissemination events will be organised during the following months.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

The preparation phase

From March to May 2023, the **selected students will work remotely with other members of the same panel** to deepen their understanding of their chosen topic. They will meet experts and follow online training on policy drafting and moderation. They will analyse the political and legal context, identify the main challenges raised by the topic and decide the priorities they wish to deal with. They will be responsible for proposing concrete solutions to these challenges, to be implemented by stakeholders at various decision levels.

The Assembly in Strasbourg

Students from dozens of countries will then be gathered for a European-wide democratic exercise when the **European Student Assembly will meet in person in Strasbourg in the very premises of the European Parliament.**

During 3 days they will discuss and finalise their recommendations with members of their panel. They will finally present them in a plenary session and get feedback from the Assembly as well as from invited stakeholders.

ESA does not charge any participation cost. Meals will be provided for free as well as accommodation for two nights in a youth hostel. The reimbursement of travel costs is at the discretion of the European University Alliances.

The dissemination phase

After the gathering of the Assembly, students will continue to work in team for the advocacy and dissemination of their proposals.

After the 2022 edition, willing students had the opportunity to meet with Members of the European Parliament and representatives from the European Commission. They participated in major stakeholders events such as the Vivatech Conference in Paris.

In 2023, a series of dissemination events will be organised to promote the results of the Assembly among stakeholders at various decision levels: elected representatives, companies, NGOs, etc.

The role of participants and coordinators

The **220 panel participants in the Assembly** will play an active role in their panel during the preparation phase, taking part in training sessions and weekly online meetings with experts and other members of their panel. Each participant is expected to attend at least half of the meetings in order to ensure the continuity of the panel discussions.

Each panel will be supported by **2 panel coordinators** – also students. They will monitor the progress of their panel, help to plan meetings with experts, and support the drafting of proposals while remaining neutral. During the on-site gathering, they will moderate the debate between panel members and present the result of the panel's work. They will contribute to organise the dissemination by panel members.

Each participant and panel coordinator will receive a certificate of participation after completion of the project.

HOW TO APPLY

Applications are **open from 12 October 2022 at 12:00 (UTC+1) to 4 December 2022 at 23:59 (UTC+1)** on the EUC website: www.euc-initiative.com/european-student-assembly/esa23-how-to-apply/

Eligibility

- Applications are open to students from all genders, nationalities, fields and levels of study from Bachelor to PhD.
- Before applying, please check that your higher education institution is involved in one of the 44 existing EUA:
 - [the EUAs selected under the 2022 Erasmus+ call](#)
 - [the EUAs selected under the 2020 Erasmus+ call](#)
- Students who did not participate in the first edition may apply as participant and/or panel coordinator.
- Students who participated in the first edition of ESA may only apply as panel coordinators.
- Members of the faculty are not eligible except for PhD candidate.

Selection process and criteria

The selection will be **conducted jointly by the ESA Selection Committee and the EUAs**. The selection process have been designed to ensure a fair, inclusive and transparent process.

The selection of participants will lay the stress on their interest for European politics, culture and society, on their motivation to participate in an intercultural event, to defend their opinion and have an impact on their community, as well as their level of excellence. The selection of panel coordinators will focus on the candidates' motivation and former experiences as group leaders in similar initiatives.

TIMELINE

**12 October
2022**

Opening of the application process

**4 December
2022**

Closing of the application process

**16 January
2023**

Results of the Panel Coordinators' selection

**February
2023**

Panel Coordinators' training

**27 February
2023**

Results of the Panel Participants' selection

**March
2023**

Participants onboarding session

**March-May
2023**

Start of the preparation phase

**31 May -
2 June 23**

European Student Assembly at the European Parliament in Strasbourg

**From June
2023**

Start of the dissemination phase

DEBATING TOPICS

The panels will explore the concept of **strategic autonomy of the European Union** and reflect how it applies to major policy fields. In the past two years, the world has gone through dramatic crises that tested the **capacity of the European Union to act as one in front of raising challenges**. External threats, such as the world financial crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and internal dissensions about European values, the European socio-economic model, and the environmental impact of the European way of life, have questioned the EU's ability to ensure its strategic autonomy. Entailing the responsibility of multiple actors at various decision levels, this notion challenges the Union's ability to **build a more cohesive and more sustainable Europe at a time when massive investments are engaged through NextGenerationEU**. The 2023 edition of ESA will bring students in defining concrete political actions that would contribute to strengthen European capacities and make it more resilient in the face of change.

Panel 1 – Deliberative *versus* representative democracy? How to reduce the gap between citizens and policy-makers and create a more united Europe?

European democracies rely on representative systems through which citizens give mandates to elected representatives to act on their behalf. The prerequisite for European strategic autonomy is a political consensus among citizens on the main political orientations defined by decision-makers. As the abstention rises and the narratives of populist parties become more and more audible, **abstention puts at risk the legitimacy and robustness of our political systems**. Meanwhile, more creative and somehow more radical forms of engagement appear, that question the monopoly of representative democracy and may offer new opportunities. An attempt to close the holes in European democracy, the Conference on the future of Europe involved thousands of citizens. In light of this unprecedented event, **could deliberation play more than a symbolic role and be the key to the renewal of European democracy?** How to facilitate a more direct and more intimate involvement of all citizens in the decision-making process at all decision levels?

Panel 2 – Lessons from the past. How could the French–German history of reconciliation serve as a model to overcome conflicts and build unity?

European integration's initial move was to guarantee a long-lasting peace between the countries joining the Community, starting with the **reconciliation between France and Germany**. It has since then been a building block of Europe's capacity to act as one in the world. In the wake of the commemoration of the 60 years of the Elysée Treaty, the panel will reflect about the **main takeaways of this friendship agreement and what it can inspire us in order to build a more united Europe**. As older generations disappear and the memory of the harsh reality they experienced fades away, new conflicts such as the war in Ukraine remind us that peace should not be taken for granted. What measures could be taken at local, national and European level to ensure that peace remains at the centre of the European project? What role can European citizens play to enhance the dialogue between States? How can Europe's shared memories be built in order to shape a common future?

Panel 3 – How to secure fair and sustainable access to energy in Europe at different levels?

As we write, the EU is about to face one of its most significant energy crises, and European citizens will be stricken by difficulties regarding basic needs such as hitting and lighting their houses, filling up their cars, etc. A driver for European integration since the creation of the ECSC in 1951, self-sufficiency is a well-worn issue of European energy strategy. Often leading to geopolitical conflicts, the **dependence on foreign sources of energy** is all the more preoccupying in a context of transition. As the European energy market is becoming more complex and less centralised, new models tend to develop at local and regional levels to tackle energy crises and environmental challenges. In this context, some communities are better prepared than others to face energy shortages and negotiate a swift transition towards sustainability. How to ensure a **fair distribution of energy in Europe**, fulfilling the short-term needs of the citizens and reaching the mid-and-long-term goal of energy transition?

Panel 4 – From farm to fork. How can local food distribution channels contribute to a fairer and more sustainable European food system.

The EU free market and CAP policy guarantee Europe's food autonomy, allowing farmers to exchange their production across Europe and consumers to get food at attractive prices. With the new challenges the EU is facing – such as food shortages, rural poverty, health issues, climate change and impact on biodiversity, **the model based on intensive agriculture, geographical specialisation and worldwide food exchanges is nowadays called into question.** Accounting for one third of our carbon emissions, our food systems need to be redesigned, and the local food chain might be part of the solution to ensure more fairness and sustainability in the food chain, from production to consumption. The panel will reflect about the interrelations between global, european and local food systems and think about concrete solutions at various levels, that could allow a fairer, more sustainable but secure European food system.

Panel 5 – Taking better care of each other. What should be the European approach to mental health?

From the Covid-19 crisis to the war in Ukraine and the rise of eco-anxiety, the European Union is experiencing a wave of events that put the mental health of its population under pressure, raising awareness about the relation between mental and physical health, and the need for more holistic answers to health issues. As the President of the European Commission expressed it in her latest State of the Union address, we need to "take better care of each other" in the future. In 2022, the European Student Assembly recommended that access to mental health be improved, with a particular focus on young people. Some groups – such as students – seem indeed more vulnerable than others. **Beyond prevention and medication, mental health also raises multi-sectoral issues such as inclusion, empowerment and human rights** that the members of the panel will address as a whole through their recommendations.

Panel 6 – How to ensure a fair and sustainable digital transition in a context of exploding demand and raw material scarcity?

The fast development of digital technologies in every aspect of our lives is an undeniable source of opportunities, but it also increases our vulnerability towards external and internal threats, creating **new forms of dependency and obvious disparities between citizens**. Yet, access to digital goods and services has become a condition for all citizens to work, communicate or benefit from private and public services. **The scarcity of raw material used in the production of digital hardware raises security and sustainability issues**. According to the World Bank, the demand for critical raw materials is expected to skyrocket by around 500% until 2050, and the dependency of the EU from China is particularly high. As the EU is currently discussing the Raw Material Act, and the resilience of raw materials supply chains has clearly become a strategic priority for the EU, it also raises the question of **digital sobriety**. How to reconcile environmental and digital transitions? Should the digital transition prioritise some sectors over others? How to ensure fair access to digital goods for all?

Panel 7 – Is the EU in a position to develop an efficient foreign policy and an autonomous defence policy that would ensure the security of its citizens?

In an increasingly challenging international environment where the **international rules-based order is put into question**, foreign policy as well as defence policy seem more important than ever. In the face of old and new threats, there is a **need for the European Union to reaffirm, and where necessary redefine, its place in the international arena**. How can the EU continue to gain credibility as a global actor and security provider while safeguarding its own interests, values and development model? Beyond other issues pertaining to the EU's common foreign and security policy such as qualified majority voting, the Union's relationship with NATO and the absence of a substantial EU defence policy remain cornerstones to the puzzle. In light of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and its economic interdependence with the People's Republic of China, **how could the EU ensure its strategic autonomy in spite of the often conflicting interests of its members?**

Panel 8 – Cities of the future. How could sustainable cities contribute in European autonomy and people welfare?

As environmental sustainability has turned out to be one of the most burning challenges of our times, **cities are both part of the problem and part of the solution**. According to the European mobility framework, 70% of the European population live in cities, generating 23% of transport-related greenhouse gas emissions. Investment in more ecological cities and urban planning figured in the report of the Conference on the Future of Europe as levers for a more sustainable Europe. Participants in the 2022 European Student Assembly most specifically mentioned the need to foster more sustainable, smarter and healthier urban mobility. **Urban planning is a matter of sustainability, territorial equity and strategic autonomy**. How to create cities that fulfil the needs of their inhabitants and interact with their environment in a way that does not endanger the life of future generations?

Panel 9 – Excellence versus inclusion? How can European higher education institutions offer a more inclusive access to skills and knowledge?

The internationalisation of academia offers more and more opportunities; but scarcity of fundings, and the need to stand out in global rankings also engages higher education institutions in a world-scale competition for the most talented students, professors and researchers. Though it may act as a driver for excellence and innovation, **this fierce competition runs the risk of leaving behind people who are disadvantaged** for disparate reasons, such as unaffordable tuition costs, lack of accessibility, self-censorship or social stigma. International mobility is still an opportunity only for very few students. Yet, **equal access to higher education and all its opportunities**, in particular in relation to international exposure, is a condition for the prosperity and social cohesion of European societies. How can European higher education institutions secure their rank in globalisation while ensuring an inclusive access to skills and knowledge for all?

Panel 10 – Contribution to the European Year of Skills – What role can higher education institutions play in reducing the skills gap?

Workforce shortages in sectors such as healthcare, transportation or engineering are expected to increase as the European Union is both ageing and undertaking a deep transformation towards an environmental-friendly and more digital economy. At the same time, adaptation and resilience are more and more expected from the workforce on job markets that are constantly evolving. As she announced the **European year of skills in 2023**, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, proposed to **invest more in upskilling and reskilling European workers while improving the attractiveness of the European job market for foreign skilled workers**. In this respect, higher education institutions face many challenges: encouraging better adequacy between curricula, market needs and learners aspirations; fostering a creative and entrepreneurial approach to the acquisition of competences; cooperating with companies and other jobs providers; developing a diversity of lifelong learning economic models; dealing with qualifications of foreign students when they are not recognised. How can European universities help welcome students across Europe and beyond, and improve learners' employability at every level?

WHO WE ARE

THE ESA STEERING COMMITTEE

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