

Citizens‘ proposals for EU policy priorities after 2024 EP elections

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Written by:
Plattform Christdemokratie, Austria,
in context of the EU-funded Project DECIDE

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PLATTFORM CHRISTDEMOKRATIE

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The DECIDE project (Democratic Engagement through Critical Information Discernment and Education) is an EU-funded initiative under CERV-2023-CITIZENS-CIV. Led by the Association "In the Name of the Family" (Croatia), with partners from Austria, Lithuania, and Croatia, the project runs from June 2024 to May 2026. One of its primary goals is to facilitate active dialogue between EU citizens and decision-makers regarding policy priorities following the 2024 European Parliament elections.

PROJECT PARTNERS

Project Lead: Udruga u Ime Obitelji (Croatia)
Partners: Plattform Christdemokratie (Austria)
Ateitininkų Federacija (Lithuania)
Svjetski Savez Mladih Jugoistočna Europa (Croatia)

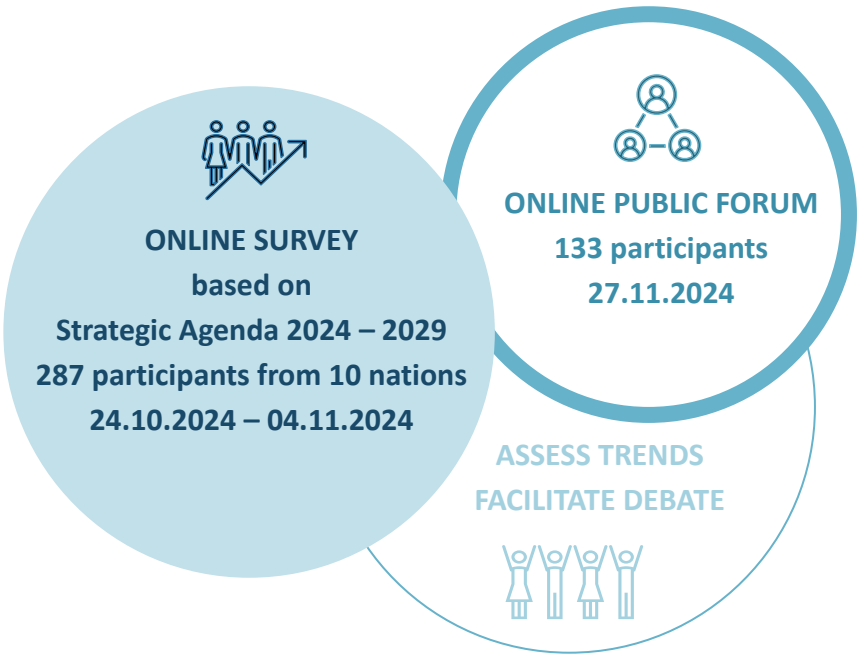
METHODOLOGY

The project team based their research on the "Strategic Agenda 2024-2029" adopted by the EC in June 2024, focusing on three main pillars:

- A free and democratic Europe
- A strong and secure Europe
- A prosperous and competitive Europe

To gather insights, the project employed a multi-faceted approach:

- Online Survey: 287 participants from 10 nations (October-November 2024)
- Online Public Forum: 133 participants (November 27, 2024)



Based on the findings from the survey, forum discussions, and feedback from the DECIDE platform, this white paper has been developed as a comprehensive reflection of citizen engagement in EU policymaking.

This document is structured into several key sections, each addressing a fundamental aspect of the European Union's strategic priorities. The first section, "For a Free and Democratic Europe", explores the values of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law while presenting recommendations for strengthening civic participation and governance. The following section, "Standing Up for Democracy and Freedom of Expression," examines the growing challenges posed by misinformation, political polarization, and freedom of speech, proposing solutions to uphold democratic discourse. The next section, "For a Strong and Secure Europe", assesses external and internal security threats, including geopolitical conflicts, migration policies, and the role of the EU in global stability. Finally, "For a Prosperous and Competitive Europe" delves into economic policies, innovation, and the strategies required to ensure a thriving and self-reliant European economy.

The white paper captures citizens' perspectives on post-2024 policy priorities, identifies key challenges in policymaking, and proposes actionable recommendations for decision-makers. It will be widely disseminated to newly elected Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) to ensure that citizens' voices influence legislative and strategic processes within the EU.

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. FOR A FREE AND DEMOCRATIC EUROPE

Most of us would quickly agree that upholding European values within the European Union is essential to ensuring a free and democratic Europe. We tend to agree that values like human dignity, human rights or freedom and democracy are to be protected. We all might want to promote democracy and protect the rule of law, but what are the right means to do so?

Survey Participants emphasized that EU policies should above all focus on values like RESPECT FOR HUMAN DIGNITY and on STANDING UP FOR DEMOCRACY AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION.

Many of the participants of the Online Survey of Project DECIDE (92 out of 287) strongly supported the principle of human dignity, which they define as ensuring the protection of life at all stages, from conception to death. In addition to a legal framework to ensure protection of human life at all stages, they strongly vote for stronger financial and educational support for families as well as single parents. Many of them see healthy family structures as most important asset to raise future generations of Europeans capable of ensuring and further improving a free and democratic Europe. The following recommendations are the outcome of our Online Survey and are listed according to participants' prioritization.

Recommendations regarding 'Respect for Human Dignity' include:

- Value and **protect life** from conception to death
- **Support families, single parents** and **children** financially & with educational initiatives
- Build on **Christian values / European traditions** when shaping EU-policies
- Enhance **social justice** in EU society
- **Respect different political opinions peacefully**, without violence

In the area of "standing up for democracy and freedom of expression" we as Europeans face some dilemmas. We live in a digitalized world where mis- and disinformation develop into serious potential threats, making it increasingly difficult to discern reliable sources and identify hidden agendas behind certain communication techniques. Yet, what are the right means to address this? Paul Coleman, one of the keynote speakers during the DECIDE Online Public Forum, pointed out that the role institutions like the EU should play in regulating this field needs careful review. He offered a critical perspective on the increasing regulation of speech through anti-disinformation laws. He traced how more countries and institutions were introducing such laws, criminalizing misinformation. However, Coleman questioned these measures. On one hand, there are unclear definitions of disinformation, and on the other, the question of authority arises: Who decides what is true or false?

Keynote speakers during the Online Public Forum:
Lukas Mandl, Member of the European Parliament
Johannes Moravitz, COMECE Policy Advisor on Ecology, Energy and Agriculture
Paul Coleman, Executive Director of ADF International

Many of the Online Survey Participants (74 out or 287) expressed concern that religious freedom and the freedom to express non-mainstream views are increasingly under pressure. Many of them also opt for increased focus on media trainings, media literacy and supporting a healthy, tolerant debating culture.

Johannes Moravitz, one of the Keynote speakers during the Online Public Forum, drew the attention of the audience to some of the ethical challenges in our modern digitalized world, warning of rising loneliness, mental health issues, and the erosion of social bonds. Moravitz called for a balanced approach to technology while upholding Christian values as a guiding principle. Ethical and ecological topics need to be integrated with the digital age.

Recommendations regarding Freedom of Expression include:

- Promote and protect **freedom of opinion, speech** and **religious freedom**
- Ensure neutral, free and **independent media** & focus on **media literacy, tolerance, debating culture, fake news detection**
- **Counteract radical positions** (left or right) and avoid distortion of decisions by loud or powerful elite minorities
- **Address threats** to democracy, e.g. external political or cyber threats, political Islam
- Encourage more **direct democracy** and greater citizen involvement

2. FOR A STRONG AND SECURE EUROPE

The aggressive war of Russia against Ukraine has painfully highlighted how fragile peace and security within Europe can be. According to many of the Online Survey Participants, the EU has not demonstrated a sufficiently unified approach in tackling external security issues in this context. But even outside the Russia-Ukraine-conflict, many participants see strong gaps in EU's security strategy.

Survey Participants emphasized that EU-policies should focus on a COMPREHENSIVE COOPERATION across EU-countries ON MIGRATION AND BOARDER MANAGEMENT.

Whilst most of them agreed that a certain amount of migration is to be seen positive to e.g. attract talent or satisfy the need for workers in different areas, the high amount of migration as well as the lacking cooperation across the EU in steering migration was strongly criticized.

Some participants supported limiting or stopping migration into the EU entirely, while others emphasized the need for a more powerful and better-coordinated effort to combat illegal migration and human trafficking.

Another significant point of criticism was the perceived insufficiency of integration efforts, with concerns that security is increasingly threatened by the growing influence of political Islam in Europe.

Recommendations for a strong and secure Europe include:

- **Stop or limit** (illegal) **migration,** establish **stronger boarder management**
- Increase **integration efforts** & ensure that **laws are kept**, otherwise strict consequences (specifically: address political Islam)
- **Develop unified EU approach** to organize migration and boarder management
- **Steer** migration **actively** (allow for skill sets we need) & **support source countries** to avoid migration
- **Fair distribution of migrants** across or within countries (city vs. rural areas)

Lukas Mandl emphasized during the Online Public Forum that the EU indeed needs to gain more strength to the outside and more freedom to the inside. In his view, only an EU with strong strategic

autonomy is set up for success. He mentioned that the EU now for the first time has a specific "defence commissioner". The EU needs to become better capable of reacting to an aggressive Putin-Russia while remaining open for dialogue with a future "other" Russia that is hopefully still to come after the current regime. The Online Public Forum audience was not necessarily aligned on the current EU strategy, some participants also warned of putting oil into the fire and rather opted for de-escalating the war and stronger diplomatic attempts to put an end this crisis.

3. FOR A PROSPEROUS AND COMPETITIVE EUROPE

The competitive position of the European Union as part of a globalized economic system is certainly challenged quite strongly by nations like China, but also the US, Russia, and many others. The EU's commitment to quality, high ecological standards, and fair wages, while commendable, also poses risks to competitiveness. How can we ensure that we pass on a prosperous European region to the next generation?

Survey Participants emphasized that EU-policies should focus on INNOVATION- AND BUSINESSFRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT.

In the context of Project DECIDE, participants of the Online Survey identified significant areas for improvement in fostering a more innovation- and business-friendly environment. Many advocated for deregulation, reducing bureaucracy, and resolving issues at a subsidiarity level. Reducing taxes on wages and ensuring affordable energy was also seen as a gamechanger by many to ensure better competitiveness of our European businesses.

However, addressing competitiveness also requires a cultural shift. EU policies should actively promote and create the framework for a performance-driven and achievement-oriented attitude while providing targeted support to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

Recommendations for a prosperous and competitive Europe include:

- Promote **innovation** and **entrepreneurial spirit**, **strengthen SMEs**
- Reduce bureaucracy and **implement deregulation** with more subsidiarity
- Develop smart energy policies, ensure **affordable energy and reduce taxes**, especially on wages
- Support **education, skill-enhancement** and **life-long learning**
- Promote **performance- and achievement driven culture,** focus on **business integrity**, and **support talents**

MEP Lukas Mandl confirmed during the Public Forum that there are currently strong attempts within the European Parliament to make "competitiveness" a major priority during the next institutional cycle within the EU. He agreed that Europe must reduce dependencies on countries like China and become more self-reliant in security matters, decreasing reliance on the U.S. and other parts of the world.

The EU will therefore need to strengthen its own innovation capabilities as well as gather more skilled labour and experts from outside. This means that we need to focus much more on life-long learning and adapt our skills as Europeans to a changing world. Therefore, the EU policies should focus on suitable education programs as well as on providing supporting frameworks for families and the young generation to prosper and develop their talents. Such a European Skills Initiative should involve digital skills training programs as well as industry-education partnerships and SME support programs.