ΠΑΡΑΡΤΗΜΑ Δ

Open discussion event for year 2 Lyceum students in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe on:
'Shaping tomorrow's Europe together: Young people have their say'

Topic Description
TOPIC A
A1. Values and rights, rule of law, security The European Union (EU) is based on a set of common values, including fundamental rights, democracy and the rule of law. These values form the foundation of the societies and the common identity of the EU Member States. Therefore, the promotion and the defense of these values are key goals for the EU and its Member States. Thus, as the core values of equality, tolerance and social justice are at the epicentre of the European vision, the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council proclaimed the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2000), which under the Treaty of Lisbon (2009) became legally binding for the EU and its Member States. The implementation of the Charter and the protection of fundamental rights constitutes a horizontal issue relevant to all areas of EU activity and must therefore be taken into consideration by all institutions. Furthermore, the primary objective of the EU and its Member States is to implement relevant policies for the protection of civil, political, economic and social rights of European citizens, as well as to shield both values and principles. More specifically, in this context, the EU has adopted actions to address inequalities in both the EU and the Member States, such as the Gender Equality Strategy, the Anti-Racism Action Plan, the LGBTQ + Equality Strategy, but also actions for the strengthening of the rights of persons with disabilities. The aim is to further promote and strengthen these policies, which in turn will help to strengthen the confidence of European citizens in the EU.

In addition, the EU has adopted a number of policies and a regulatory framework to ensure a high level of protection of consumer rights, since trade security leads precisely to the further enhancement of the internal market and the economy.

Simultaneously, the EU has intensified its efforts to further strengthen the rule of law, given that democracy cannot prosper without independent courts guaranteeing the protection of fundamental rights and civil liberties, nor without an active civil society and media plurality. The rule of law has a direct impact on the life of each and every citizen. It constitutes a precondition for ensuring equal treatment before the law and for defending the rights of EU citizens. It is essential for the implementation of the EU law and policies, and it is crucial for a Union of equality, opportunities and social justice.

The EU has a number of substantial rules for strengthening the rule of law in the Member States as well as in third countries. The recent addition of two more tools for monitoring and strengthening the rule of law in the Member States, i.e., the annual European Rule of Law Mechanism and the conditionality clause, which links the rule of law with the EU budget, contributes substantially to both the creation of more democratic societies and the development of a more democratic and fairer civic-mindedness.

A2. European Democracy

The adoption of the 'European Action Plan for Democracy' aims to cultivate and to strengthen active citizenship as well as to build more resilient democracies throughout the EU. This action plan sets out measures around three main pillars: (a) the promotion of free and fair elections (b) the strengthening of media freedom and pluralism; and (c) the combat against misinformation (https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/new-push-european-democracy/european-democracy-action-plan_el).

Finally, in order to ensure stability and security in both the Member States and the EU from modern threats, the new EU Security Strategy that has been adopted provides tools and measures to ensure security in both the world and the digital environment. The strategic priorities of the action include: (a) building a resilient security environment in the future, (b) tackling evolving threats, (c) protecting European citizens from terrorism and organized crime, and (d) developing a strong security ecosystem.

Questions:

1. How do you assess the effectiveness of the EU policies, measures and actions in promoting the rule of law? In your opinion, moreover, in what ways can their efficiency be improved?

2. How can Member States' co-operation be strengthened to protect human rights, and what further measures can the EU take to promote the rule of law?

3. In what ways can the cooperation among the Member States be reinforced to meet the emerging challenges for our democratic systems?

4. What is the role of education in empowering the perception of the protection of human rights (especially in students but also in the society as a whole), and how can the concept of the rule of law be enhanced? How can the EU promote this effort?

5. How can young people contribute to the strengthening of human rights and the concept of the rule of law through EU initiatives?

TOPIC B

Migration

More than 3.2 million asylum seekers have applied for international protection in the EU since 2015. Therefore, further to the efforts made to strengthen democratic institutions and empower European citizens, the EU also aims to help Europe effectively overcome the challenges of migration through a common migration and asylum policy.

With the new Pact on Migration and Asylum, the EU aims to establish a holistic approach that will ensure that people in need of international protection will have access to asylum, and that third-country nationals who do not have a legal right of residence in the EU will be repatriated to their countries of origin with full respect of their fundamental rights. In addition to the Pact, the EU is adopting the appropriate tools to combat human trafficking and to address the consequences of the instrumentalization of migration, while simultaneously integrating those who have a legal right of residence in the Member States. The big bet for the EU is to make the most of the benefits of migration, while reducing its negative aspects.

Questions:

1. How can the EU make the most of migration in all areas (economic, cultural, social)?

2. Given that multiculturalism is an important element of the European identity, how do you perceive this principle in relation to our foreign citizens?

TOPIC C

The role of the EU in the world

The EU seeks to tackle international problems through rules, cooperation among countries and collective action. It pursues a coordinated approach to its external actions to ensure that Europe's voice in the world stage is strong and united. It also works closely with neighboring countries and cultivates relations and alliances with non-EU countries, International Bodies and International Organizations, especially with those they share the same values and global goals, for instance, the security of the Member States, the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate, etc.

'The EU in the world' is one of the topics of the Conference on the Future of Europe. In this context, citizens are invited to express their ideas on how to strengthen a responsible global leadership and how to address through collaborative work serious issues, such as peace and security, climate change, sustainable development and global recovery.

Questions:

1. What is the EU's role in the world? How do you rate it? Would you change some of its elements? If so, in what areas do improvements need to be made so that the EU has a stronger presence on the international stage? If not, explain.

2. How can the EU improve its action plan to strengthen the fight against the pandemic and the climate change, thereby making its voice stronger in the world?

3. How can young people contribute to an enhanced EU role in the world?