

PP2-llnew2 FYEG Political Platform - A Democratic Europe

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Political Platform text

2. A Democratic Europe

Democracy is increasingly under attack, both in Europe and elsewhere. Authoritarian leaders ignore democratic principles and violate the rule of law* – even within the European Union. Some states proclaim themselves to be so-called “illiberal democracies”*. At the same time, technological and digital developments are having wide-reaching implications for fundamental rights, posing substantial challenges to our democracies, while also bringing new possibilities for democratic participation and new forms of activism.

FYEG fights for a Europe and a European Union which are truly democratic and embrace and encourage the active participation of their inhabitants. We advocate for the strong protection of the rights of these inhabitants, especially the most vulnerable, young people, and those that engage in activism in order to better our societies.

a. The rule of law

The rule of law is an essential element of democratic societies. In recent years, attacks on the rule of law have multiplied in several European countries, with women and minorities most strongly affected. FYEG stands for reinforcing the independence of the judiciary, accelerating the fight against corruption, and guaranteeing the independence of the media.

In the EU, we call for the full implementation of Article 7 of the Treaty on European Union* allowing for the scrutiny and possible suspension of a Member State’s voting rights in the Council of the EU if they fail to respect the fundamental values of the Union including the rule of law, in the short term. This decision should be taken via qualified majority*. In the long term, the power to impose sanctions on member states and to suspend voting rights of member states in the Council should become matters for the Court of Justice of

the European Union* (CJEU). FYEG also supports the implementation of a strong rule of law mechanism*, according to which the granting of EU funding is made conditional upon Member States' respect of the rule of law and fundamental rights.

While implementing those tools, we must ensure that citizens are not disadvantaged by their governments' poor behaviour. It should be made possible to bypass corrupt national governments and for EU funds to be directly assigned to local authorities or final beneficiaries. We also call for increased support for individuals and organisations that are fighting for democracy, press freedom, fundamental rights, and the rule of law, for example through the EU Rights and Values programme*. In particular, whistleblowers must benefit from specific protection and support, as they reveal informations and documents of public interest and for the common good.

The European judicial system should be reinforced. The Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU)* should have more power to protect citizens and uphold fundamental rights. We support reinforcing the prerogatives and powers of the European Public Prosecutor's Office* to investigate and press charges in more fields, beginning with corruption, the misuse of public money, and international crime.

b. Democracy

FYEG supports representative democratic systems in which citizens elect representatives to debate issues and make decisions on their behalf. We support parliamentary systems* over presidential systems* in which power is concentrated in the hands of a single person and proper debate is not possible. Representatives should be elected using a system of proportional representation*.

Those current systems in which elected officials are seen as being cut off from citizens and not accountable to the electorate are clearly not functioning well enough and are creating mistrust in democracy itself. Action is needed at several levels to protect and improve our democratic systems.

To complement representative democratic systems, FYEG supports introducing and reinforcing direct democracy mechanisms such as participatory budgeting*, special assemblies composed of randomly chosen citizens, citizens' initiatives, the right to petition, citizen-initiated referendums*, the right to challenge*, and representative recalls*. Democratic institutions should also be made more transparent, with all debates open or publicly available, public registers detailing the financial interests of every elected official, and full transparency on lobbying activities.

FYEG is also supportive of the subsidiarity principle*. Every decision that affects the lives of citizens should be taken at the level that is closest to them, where they can more easily play an active role and hold their representatives accountable. Local and regional governments should be given more power, and their participation in decision-making processes at the European level should be reinforced. Forms of democracy inspired by the principles of commons* and based on the public, democratic management of the commons, especially water and public space, should be implemented to the greatest possible extent. Our aim needs to be to create liveable, democratic spaces in our towns and cities.

The right to take part in democratic processes should be open to as many people as possible and should be based primarily on a person's place of residence rather than nationality. All foreign citizens should enjoy the right to vote in their place of residence for all elections. Nobody should be deprived of the right to vote because of their age, nationality, ethnicity, the fact that they are in prison, or any other criteria. Young people in particular are systematically excluded from decision-making processes, for example by not being allowed to vote. FYEG stands for lowering the voting age, starting with giving the right to vote to everyone aged 16 and above.

Action needs to be taken to enable the civic participation of groups and communities that are excluded from participation in decision-making processes, such as young people, including strengthening training, supporting youth political organisations, and using non-formal education methods.

c. An activist Europe

Democratic participation must never be limited to the polling booth. The right to protest is a fundamental part of democratic culture and must be protected. We encourage active participation in our democracies, not only through political organisations but also through civil society and activist work. The EU, its Member States, and other European states must actively support and encourage civil society and youth political engagement.

The right to organise and to take part in protests freely, without experiencing threats, intimidation, or violence, should be protected. We also defend the right of journalists and citizens to document demonstrations and police activities during those demonstrations.

In their work for a better society, activists often make use of civil disobedience*, involving the refusal to obey certain laws. While the authorities may not welcome its use, their reaction to civil disobedience is often disproportionate to the point of being unacceptable. The rights of activists must be defended under all circumstances.

This also applies to cases in which actions to bring about effective climate action or defend human rights go against the law as it stands. An example of this is the important lifesaving work carried out by private sea rescue missions. Their actions should be applauded and supported, not criminalised.

d. Towards a federal Europe

Most of the challenges Europe is facing cannot be solved at the local or national level alone. A stronger, more integrated, and federal Europe* is needed to address citizens' demands.

As the only directly elected EU institution, the European Parliament* is key to building a stronger Europe. In the short term, its Members should be elected partly on national lists and partly on Union-wide lists, while ensuring the fair representation of all Member States. Instead of being presented with the European Council's* choice of European Commission* president, the European Parliament should be able to elect the candidate of its choice. We believe Commissioners should not be appointed by Member States but chosen by Members of the European Parliament while guaranteeing fair representation of Member States. Moreover, the European Parliament should have the right to initiate legislation.

We call on Member States to find a solution to the issue of the seats of different EU institutions, while making sure all decision-making bodies are not concentrated in the same city or country.

Many long-awaited progressive initiatives have been blocked by the Council of the European Union*. In the short term, decisions at the Council should be taken by qualified majority* and not by unanimity* on budgetary, social, and fiscal policy. This would both facilitate European action in many fields and reinforce the influence of the European Parliament.

In the long term, FYEG demands the election of a European citizens' convention. This body would be responsible for drafting an EU constitution that would replace the existing treaties and pave the way for a federal and truly democratic Europe. This European constitution should then be voted on through a Union-wide referendum.

A stronger Europe requires a real European budget. The EU budget should be substantially increased, in particular by the creation of new "own resources"* such as a European kerosene* tax, a carbon tax*, a carbon border adjustment mechanism*, a tax on tech giants, and a tax on financial transactions* (see Chapter 4 – Fiscal policy). The EU should also be able to issue bonds to contribute to its budget.

The European Union will not become stronger by closing itself off from others. EU membership should be open to all European countries that are not yet or no longer members of the EU. We support the accession of countries who express the wish to join the EU if they meet human rights, democratic, and rule of law criteria. The European Union should develop and maintain strong cooperation with neighbouring countries who are not members of the EU, including by guaranteeing visa-free travel and participation in key programmes such as Erasmus+*.

e. Public safety

We believe that every person in our societies should be safe and feel safe. Today's mainstream public safety policies are not fulfilling that objective: many citizens still feel unsafe and are being attacked based on their gender, appearance, supposed sexual orientation, or gender identity, and on racist and xenophobic* grounds. Violence is still a major part of our societies. A public safety policy that aims to end violence by employing even more violence, and that is executed at the expense of public freedoms and fundamental rights, is doomed to fail. FYEG stands for a reinvention of public safety policy based on prevention and rehabilitation rather than violence and repression.

Prevention should be central. We believe that, among others, better education, the teaching of nonviolent communication, gender equality, and tackling racism contribute to reducing the level of violence in society. Public safety is interlinked with social policies. Implementing stronger social policies and fighting against poverty is key to improvement in the long term. We support the integration of stronger, more situation-specific social policies in neighbourhoods with the highest levels of poverty. Prevention recognises that the police cannot be the solution to every issue. Specific personnel such as psychologists and street and other social workers can work better with people in certain psychological states, with homeless people, and with victims of violence. These jobs should be supported and better funded.

The police has become a cornerstone of failing public safety policies. While we believe some form of policing is needed, the police needs to be fundamentally changed. A zero-tolerance policy on racism, sexism, and other hateful conduct in the police is essential. The police should be made accountable for its actions and an independent police oversight body should be put in place to investigate police violence and other complaints. Democratic scrutiny of the police, in which police chiefs are accountable to local assemblies and regularly answer questions during public sessions, is of critical importance. Additionally, policing must be demilitarised. It is unnecessary for the police to have military-like vehicles and heavily armed officers with assault rifles and grenades. There must be structural change – a movement away from state-sponsored violence and repression and towards prevention and cooperation as tools for dealing with conflict in our societies.

We also support the improvement of the employment and working conditions of police employees. In some countries, many are overworked and under a lot of pressure, have poor working conditions, and receive low salaries. This contributes to an increased use of violence, higher levels of corruption, and poor quality service. Police employees should receive better training, especially concerning gender-based violence, the tackling of unconscious bias*, nonviolent communication, and nonviolent conflict resolution techniques.

Certain policies such as drug policies and migration policies create avoidable violence. The criminalisation of the use, cultivation, and selling of drugs, as well as the criminalisation of migration, actively supports the development of underground mafia systems who rely on the use of violence. FYEG stands for the legalisation of drugs* and opening borders as a way of reducing violence and reinforcing security (see Chapter 5 – Health).

The judicial system also has a role to play in the prevention of crime by repeat offenders, by ensuring that convicted people receive adequate psychological support, prioritising alternatives to prison, and promoting the rehabilitation and reintegration of convicted people.

f. Digital rights

As citizens' use of digital products increases, digital rights become more and more important. FYEG believes digital rights are key to fully exercising other fundamental rights, such as the right to access information held by public authorities, to freedom of opinion and expression, and to political activism. Digital activism has become an important part of political activism and must be defended. We therefore stand for an internet in which those rights can be fully exercised and for a regulatory framework that fully protects citizens.

Digitalisation* should not be an excuse for states and companies to spy on citizens. Communication via the internet must be protected by encryption. We oppose government-requested loopholes or the weakening of that encryption. The secrecy of correspondence* should be extended to include all digital communication, including metadata*. We defend the principle of self-determination in relation to one's personal data, as well as the outlawing of mass data retention* by private companies. Targeted advertisements and third-party cookies should be made illegal. The right to be forgotten* should also be protected.

FYEG believes in the power of free software and open source-based platforms*, which must be strengthened by the European Union in order to guarantee full transparency in the fight for consumer rights. Alternatives to tech giants should be established that abide by these principles. In order for alternatives to emerge, it is essential to defend the principle of net neutrality*.

We fight for access to the internet and an accessible internet. This means universal access to the necessary infrastructure and broadband, as well as internet access at no charge. It also means accessibility for disabled people through the mainstreaming of subtitles, alternative text*, etc.

In times in which almost everyone and everything is digitally connected, we also fight for a stronger right to disconnect* for workers.

Digital and technological developments have the power to fundamentally change our societies. The opportunities these technologies bring must be used to strengthen democratic participation. Online pseudonymity must be protected as this is key for people to express their political or personal opinions without fear and without risking negative consequences.

The digital sphere is not a lawless space. Private companies that are active in the digital sphere must be regulated and pay taxes. Discrimination and hate speech in the digital sphere must be recognised as problematic, and combatted. This includes developments in the realm of artificial intelligence*, which has the potential to transform our societies for the better but also risks reinforcing existing discrimination through biased algorithms.

The spread of disinformation and fake news has the potential to undermine our democracies and must be dealt with accordingly by effective legislation and training. This includes protection against foreign interference in democratic processes and the fight against terrorism. The pursuit of these goals must never be used as an excuse to pass legislation that amounts to censorship. We oppose the use of upload filters*.