

The Senate of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (A.U.T.H.) founded the Centre for European Legal Culture (C.E.L.C.) in 2018, with the aim of fostering the participation of citizens in European affairs through their identification with common values, rules and institutions.

One of the ways that the C.E.L.C. has implemented in order to serve the purpose for which it was founded, is the organization in Thessaloniki, every year, of a Human Rights Forum, where representatives of public authorities, NGO representatives and academics from Greece and abroad, gather and consult around a different theme each time.

The 4th Forum was held in Thessaloniki, on 10 and 11 November 2022, on the theme “YOUTH AND EUROPE: A BIDIRECTIONAL RELATIONSHIP.” From the outset, the conference was highlighted as a contribution to the “EUROPEAN YEAR OF YOUTH 2022.” Students from different faculties of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, under the supervision of professors, prepared proposals that were divided into 6 thematic groups.

We summarize, below, some of the proposals for action by the European Union in favour of young people, which were submitted to the 4th Thessaloniki Human Rights Forum, and which, following the “EUROPEAN YEAR OF YOUTH 2022,” we bring to the attention of the European Authorities.

THEME GROUP 1:

“Education, Training, Retraining, Traineeships: the contribution of the European Union.”

PROPOSALS under the heading:

“Education in the E.U.: A central concept in a marginalised position?”

In order to achieve the EU's goal of “Open Science”, a strong legislative framework is needed, which will enshrine a comprehensive proposal for securing resources, finding or developing infrastructure and empowering human resources. Only when such serious and responsible initiatives are taken, will there be room for extroversion of any research project. This will have the effect of speeding up scientific discoveries, promoting research through collaboration, mutual validation of research assumptions, as well as promoting communication between research organisations, breaking down the barriers and limited scientific “consumption”. Each research project should not operate “selfishly”, but should pass the baton to the next one. Only then does such a “relay race” make sense.

Education is one of the strongest pillars of a society, let alone a European society. Its fortification must be based on cooperation between the peoples of Europe, working not in isolation, but collectively. The intention is there,

but the reforms that will put into practice what has so far remained in theory, remain to be adopted.

[GIORGOS BASTOUNAS]

PROPOSALS under the title:

“Erasmus+, through the eyes of students.”

The two proposed steps for upgrading Erasmus+ are as follows:

- In order for students to be easily and quickly informed about which courses from other universities are compatible with their own, such courses could be displayed directly on the website of the university concerned, where the bilateral agreements are listed. Given that the lecturers of the two institutions will have agreed which courses will be recognized and which will not, such a solution will eliminate the need for further consultation with each student individually, thus simplifying the Erasmus+ application process.
- Creation of pan-European standards and rules, although this may require further integration of European education policy.

In conclusion, because the impact of Erasmus+ mobility is almost undoubtedly beneficial, it is desirable that it should soon be made accessible to all young people, not just to a lucky few.

[CHRISTINA KARAFYLLIA]

THEME GROUP 2:

“Youth employment and entrepreneurship in the E.U.”

PROPOSALS under the heading:

“Social entrepreneurship for social cohesion and sustainable development in the European Union.”

In Greece, the main barriers to the development of social enterprises include: the limited awareness of the institution and of the value of social entrepreneurship, the lack of appropriate support services for social entrepreneurs, as well as the increased bureaucracy resulting from national legislation on social entrepreneurship.

In the current programming period 2021-2027, the European Union is promoting experimentation in the field of social economy, the development of a collaborative framework between Member States, the exchange and dissemination of good practices, as well as the training of young social economy

professionals. Drawing on the European experience and transferring good practices between European Member States can contribute significantly to the development and consolidation of a sustainable social enterprise ecosystem, with a view to strengthening European cohesion and sustainable development, particularly in times of socio-economic crisis.

[EVAGGELIA STERGIU]

THEME GROUP 3:

“Health and young people in the European Union”

PROPOSALS under the heading:

“Contraception-Family planning in the European Union today.”

Call for action: Improving access to contraception policies for young people in Europe.

Proposals:

1. Increasing awareness of contraceptive methods, particularly of the most reliable methods.

- Each European country should have an online website providing comprehensive and reliable information on a full range of contraceptive methods, enabling everyone to make an informed decision.

- Young people who cite school as their main source of information have the highest knowledge of contraceptives, thus priority should be given to comprehensive information on sex education in schools.

- Inclusion of young voices in program designing is a key factor contributing to success.

2. Member states must ensure the availability of a wide range of contraceptives, including the most reliable methods for the whole population. While LARCs are the most reliable contraceptive method for preventing pregnancy, they are used by only a small percentage of respondents, most of whom live in countries with good contraceptive access policies with general youth reimbursement programs. This confirms the need for governments to bear the cost of contraception, especially for LARCs, which often represent a high one-time cost to the user, but offer more reliable protection.

3. Public health strategies to promote contraceptive methods, which will be:

- Evidence-based.

- Inclusive of all socio-economic groups and sexual preferences.

- Inclusive of people with disabilities.

4. Acceptance of contraceptive use by young people needs to be promoted at the societal level, in order to reduce the taboo on contraceptive use, the social pressure not to use contraceptives and the judgmental attitudes from health care providers.

5. Health workers should receive regular training on contraceptive counseling that includes all modern methods.

[MARIA-ANASTASIA MYLONIDOU]

PROPOSALS under the heading:

“Educational initiatives on sexual health of young people in the European Union.”

Sexual education should be included from the very first classes of primary education in the Member States, in order, firstly, to avoid the formation of false opinions and perceptions, secondly, to allow sufficient time during the course of pupils' education to assimilate and teach all the issues that need to be addressed and, thirdly, to ensure that sexual health issues are not taboo in modern societies. Furthermore, it is essential that there should be a manual for teaching this subject in the Member States, in order to avoid major omissions and discrepancies.

The sexuality and sexual health of people from the LGBTQ+ community should form a key part of the content of this course. These people are currently not informed in depth about prevention practices in their sexual contacts and, more generally, about the importance of their sexual health. Moreover, this lack of information has led to a climate of racism towards these people. Therefore, a sexual health course should include specific references to this subgroup in each of its sections in order to not only provide accurate information to these individuals, but also to combat stigma in the community.

[HELENI AVRAMIDOU]

THEME GROUP 4:

“Culture and youth in the European Union.”

PROPOSALS under the heading:

“Free, reduced or normal admission? Here is the question. A vision for a common European cultural policy.”

All Member States of the European Union should offer all young European citizens free access to national and public cultural sites, such as

archaeological sites and monuments, museums, permanent exhibitions and artistic performances. In addition, the EU should evaluate and categorize private cultural institutions with a view to funding them, so that they in turn can offer young people reduced prices. This initiative could be implemented by setting up a platform linking the young people concerned with the relevant institutions. Through this, the E.U. would be able to monitor the initiative, young people would have the opportunity to be easily informed about all cultural events, while the participating institutions would, in addition to the EU's incentives, receive free publicity and increase their audience in the long term.

In conclusion, culture is linked to humanism, the ideal according to which the human being is the supreme value and, therefore, we must show him or her due respect. These two concepts are interrelated and cannot exist without each other. Thus, if the European Union wishes to “mold” the European citizen of the future with values and ideals, it is necessary to promote culture among young people and to facilitate their contact with all its manifestations.

[KONSTANTINOS ANTONOPOULOS]

PROPOSALS under the heading:

“The inclusion of young people in sports through European Union programs.”

In order to reduce the commercialization of sports, measures could be taken, such as the funding of sports teams, especially in small areas, where it is observed that sporting options are limited due to the lack of facilities. Furthermore, the promotion of appropriate role models, which are not influenced by political and personal interests, should be adopted. These should include good and healthy role models for young sports enthusiasts, which will inspire and encourage them to become more involved and to focus on the positive aspects of sporting activities.

[VERA KALAITZIDOU]

PROPOSALS under the heading:

“The impact of the E.U. as a means of support for the emergence of young artists.”

The E.U. runs a number of programs aimed at promoting young artists. However, in these matters there is a lack of information from the E.U., and, therefore, from the Member States, thus young artists are not in a position to know whether the E.U. can help them promote themselves. Furthermore,

there is no clear information on how a young artist can participate in such programs and be promoted, i.e. what are the relevant criteria.

Finally, the E.U. could provide funding or scholarships for young people who want to train in a particular art form through educational programs. The E.U. could also set up information workshops on existing programs. As knowledge is now widely open and accessible to all via the Internet, the E.U. and the Member States, can take advantage of the very potential of the Internet to inform young people who do not live in large urban centers, as the information problem mainly concerns young people in such areas.

[HELENI PAPADOPOULOU]

THEME GROUP 5:

“Climate change and environment. Young people's attitudes towards European policies.”

PROPOSALS under the heading:

“Tourism: Sustainability, Resilience and Climate Change in the EU.”

The obvious adverse consequences of the climate crisis and the environmental burden require a review of the given attitudes and mechanisms of the state. In this field, the European legislator could include sustainable tourism as a concurrent competence of the Union and, through the close cooperation of the Member States with the E.U. institutions, create a common single economic policy through directives on sustainable tourism, so that the objectives and parameters of this concept can be implemented in the next tourist season, particularly the summer season. The “Interreg” programs, which have helped to protect natural wealth in many areas of continental Europe, should be extended in particular to the Mediterranean coastal areas, where evidence shows that the ecosystem and marine wealth of several areas with a beach and organized hotels are affected. The positive forecasts of a rapid increase in tourism and tourist numbers in the Union by 2030 make it all the more necessary to take action. Member States must consider the combination of a quality tourism product with high revenues for the national budget on the one hand, and on the other hand the responsibility of humanity in adapting the wonderful experience of being a tourist with a zero environmental footprint. In this direction, Greece, as well the E.U. and the other member states, must take a position, politically and practically.

[EUSTATHIOS SIDIROPOULOS]

PROPOSALS under the heading:

“Tourism and Development: relations of respect between Society, Environment and Economy in times of crisis.”

Strategy development requires an approach to tourism as a horizontal economic activity in the context of sustainable development, which is an imperative for modern societies. In particular, the tourism strategy must be implemented on the basis of the principle of sustainability, i.e. the development of the economy, taking into account the limits of the environment (depletion of natural resources, protected areas, etc.), respecting society (human rights, local population, culture), while also taking into account national and European climate actions. To this end, a series of direct and indirect actions to promote sustainable tourism could be carried out, the design of which would be based on an examination of the actions in a collective sustainability framework.

Direct actions include supporting the development of alternative forms of tourism, such as agritourism, ecotourism, sports tourism, gastronomic tourism, wellness tourism and tourism for the elderly, by means of subsidizing new ideas and support for related businesses. Similarly, decentralization of tourism could take place by promoting less popular forms of tourism, but also by funding programs for upgrading such forms (aesthetically and functionally).

Finally, in a European legal framework, the adoption of a Directive on Sustainable Tourism, with a view to making it compulsory to assess its negative impact in countries, with a focus on the European South, is considered necessary. Indirect actions include the obligation to include the concepts of adaptability, resilience and sustainability in the studies of public and private projects, so that their implementation takes place in a broader context, following a holistic examination of all aspects relating to their construction and operation. Equally important is the protection of the primary sector by preventing the conversion of cultivated land into built-up areas for accommodation, as well as the obligation to evaluate tourism and climate change in the Strategic Planning of the regions of each country.

[HARIS STAVRIDIS]

PROPOSALS under the heading:

“Sustainable tourism development: The central role of the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals and the World Tourism Organization in promoting the development of responsible and sustainable tourism.”

Tourism development, in order to be sustainable, should be based on long-term planning, cooperation, on global and effective communication among all the concerned actors. Unilateral actions by private individuals or

individual choices by tourists enhance the effort for sustainable tourism, but do not constitute a comprehensive and massive solution to the issue of sustainability.

[DIMITRA KARAVITI]

THEME GROUP 6:

“Participation of young people in the E.U. decision-making process.”

PROPOSALS under the heading:

“Shortcomings and operational gaps in the active participation of young people in the EU decision-making process.”

The following factors inhibit young people's decision to participate actively in European policy-making: A) The labyrinthine bureaucracy, lengthy procedures and legal and institutional complexity that govern the European Union, which are not easily understood by its citizens and exacerbate the problems with its functioning. B) The fact that the European Parliament, the institution through which the European peoples are expressed, which is the co-legislator and the main institution of democratic control and accountability at the level of the European Union in times of crisis, under the responsibility of the Member States and the European Council, is reduced to the role of a passive observer, who is informed ex post of the decisions adopted.

Citizens no longer know who to blame for the decision-making choices of the institutions. But even if they protest collectively, their chances of being heard are limited, insofar as they cannot afford the organizational and communication costs, or lack the necessary intensity to make themselves visible.

What is mainly lacking are the processes, that would give young people a sense of belonging to a political collective that transcends the sovereign states, in which they live. More than ever before, it is necessary to cultivate a sense of belonging, of co-decision-making for the construction of a common future, but also of a sense of collective responsibility for the course of the Union.

[XENIA MANTZOUFA]

PROPOSALS under the heading:

“Practices to improve the participation of young people in the decision-making process.”

Some Member States of the European Union, such as the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Italy, have developed practices that enhance the participation of young people and promote their involvement in public life through a number of initiatives. It is therefore necessary for the Member States of the European Union not only to exchange good practices, but also to integrate the issue of young people's participation in policy-making bodies into their strategies through initiatives at national level. In this way, it is possible for young people to move from being passive recipients of developments to becoming co-determinants in policy-making.

[DESPINA HELVATZOGLOU]