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RESHAPE EUROPE HACKATHONS 2023



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Introduction

#ReshapeEurope Campaign

The Russian war against Ukraine has revealed a multitude of challenges for the EU. A new competition for influence between global players has been set in motion, whereby the binding power of the West is not as strong as expected. In a world characterised by strategic rivalry between authoritarian states and liberal democracies, these are alarming developments. In order to defend the model of free and democratic societies against authoritarian threats, the European project must regain its global appeal. To this end, the EU must demonstrate that free and democratic societies are best suited to master major challenges. At the same time, the EU must strengthen its global partnerships and not relinquish them to the influence of global players with opposing values.

How can the EU's model of liberal democracy be defended and promoted at home and around the world? How should the EU's global partnerships and alliances with other countries and regions be shaped in the future to strengthen liberal democracy against authoritarian threats?

As a global foundation, the Friedrich Naumann Foundation looks beyond Europe's borders when answering these questions and involves its international network of expertise and partners. With its global campaign **#ReshapeEurope**, the Friedrich Naumann Foundation seeks to promote European values globally, attract new young target groups and foster political education for democracy and liberal democracy worldwide.

Global Hackathon Series

WHAT – In a worldwide hackathon series, the Friedrich Naumann Foundation and its global partners discussed how to strengthen the EU's role in other world regions. The hackathons took place in eight world regions: Western Europe, Eastern Europe, the MENA region, Sub-Saharan Africa, North America, Latin America, Southeast Asia and South Asia.

HOW – The idea behind a hackathon comes from the IT sector, where groups of tech-savvy contestants tackle an IT or coding issue. This concept has gained popularity in recent years beyond the tech sphere and found great traction in the political environment. Over the course of several days (and sometimes even several stages), teams of creative and open-minded young people proposed innovative policies or project ideas on how to strengthen the EU's role across the globe and how to foster democratic cooperation with other world regions.

WHO – Young people today worry about their future. They see challenges to our democracies, societies and the

environment ahead and they are ready to propose solutions and hold politicians accountable. The Friedrich Naumann Foundation recognises young changemakers as a key target group, and seeks to tap into this potential in order to find liberal innovative solutions to global challenges.

WHY – The main objective of the #ReshapeEurope hackathons was to explore how the EU can be strengthened as a global actor promoting liberal values. Each of the eight **#ReshapeEurope** hackathons concentrated on one of the following policy areas:

- **The EU as Security and Defense Actor**
 - What role does the EU play in light of conflicts and wars, such as the Russian aggression against Ukraine, and how can it organise itself better internally to prepare for future scenarios?
 - What could our future security architecture look like and what mechanisms must be put in place for it to become a credible security and defence actor on the global stage?
- **The EU's Role in a New World Order**
 - In light of increasing systemic competition between authoritarian states and liberal democracies, how can the EU foster democratic cooperation with other countries and world regions?
 - How should the EU reform itself in order to become a more unified actor on the international stage to assume global leadership?
- **The EU as Economic Power House**
 - Economy and trade are the EU's most powerful tools. How can the EU use its economic power to foster partnerships and work with other regions to tackle global challenges?
- **The EU's Role in Promoting Human Rights & Democracy**
 - The EU is largely regarded as a beacon for democratic values and the promotion of human rights. How can the EU support democratic reform processes and help promote good governance abroad?

The following chapters present the winning proposals of the **#ReshapeEurope** hackathons in the eight world regions. All winning ideas were presented in a final pitch at an international conference on 10 October in Berlin.

1. EUROPEAN DIALOGUE

Advancing European Defence Integration: The Digital Defence Marketplace (DDM)

By Silvio Junger & Nico Stein

1.1. Background

In a rapidly evolving global landscape, especially in light of Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine, the imperatives of strengthening Europe's defence capabilities and removing long-running inefficiencies in the defence industry are more pressing than ever. Cumulative defence spending in Europe multiplies many times that of Russia's. However, EU Member States failed to align their spending to create a strong military deterrent. Moreover, the EU – despite many positive efforts such as the implementation of the *European Peace Facility* – has failed to provide for a strong defence industrial base in Europe. Owing to its combined financial potential, the EU could do much better in terms of defence. One reason for this lack of capabilities is the striking redundancy of weapon systems and inefficient procurement processes. European militaries currently use 16 different types of primary battle tanks, more than one dozen types of fighter jets and 27 distinct procurement processes. This negatively affects interoperability and efficiency regarding MRO (Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul). The EU has recently presented the *European Defence Industry Reinforcement through Common Procurement Act* (EDIRPA), which incentivises EU Member States to jointly procure defence products. This is a welcome step in the right direction, but it still falls short in two crucial areas, which are addressed in this proposal: firstly, the proposed *Digital Defence Marketplace (DDM)* provides greater efficiency by streamlining all national processes into a single European procurement process rather than the EDIRPA, which merely serves as the 28th distinct European procurement process. Secondly, incorporating new weapons' development into the long-term approach will strongly support innovation in the European defence industry.

1.2. Project Objectives/Impact

The unified development and procurement process ventures beyond the limits of the EDIRPA by advocating for a holistic approach that embraces joint weapon development, alongside procurement. An expansion of the *European Defence Agency* (EDA) as well as an extension of the *European Defence Fund* (EDF) will promote cross-border research and development. This commitment to fostering an innovation-driven ecosystem and economic growth will position the EU at the forefront of defence technology and innovation. Eliminating redundancies and realising economies of scale through large long-term contracts promises substantial cost reductions in research, development and procurement of weapon systems. A transparent and easily accessible tendering process reduces bu-

reaucracy and ensures equal opportunities for all European companies. Significant gains in European military capabilities will result from better interoperability of European armed forces. Increased competition in the defence sector will further reduce prices and promote innovation, hence advancing Europe's status as cutting-edge in military technology. High-volume supply contracts will provide European companies with the planning security needed to shore up production facilities, thereby greatly improving Europe's production capacities of military hardware, which has proven to be a major problem in the current European defence sector. These advantages will allow Europe to play a more active role in global politics and provide strong support to global partners.

1.3. Stakeholders

At the heart of liberal principles lies the essence of robust and transparent stakeholder engagement. **EU Member States** will remain in full control over the type and quantity of weapon systems supplied for their military, but will need to adapt the novel streamlined development and procurement process. **The EDA** will expand and build the capacities needed for handling the newly assigned tasks (see "Main Provisions"). **European institutions**, especially the European parliament, will assume new responsibilities in guaranteeing democratic oversight and allocating sufficient resources to the EDA and the EDF. European **defence companies** will adapt to the new market dynamics and benefit from new lucrative, long-term European contracts. **NATO** will continue to set common standards for defence equipment and will benefit from increased capabilities and interoperability of European military.

1.4. Main Provisions

The EDA will be transformed into the organisation responsible for harmonising and bundling all weapon development and procurement processes of EU countries. Member States – keeping full control over the quantity and quality of military procurements – will determine their needs and register their demands for future weapon system developments, planned procurements and specifications with the EDA. Those demands are then pooled together, and a single European tendering process is started. The best company or consortium receives a long-term contract, partially funded by the EDF.

The current version of the EDIRPA defines sensible criteria for the eligibility of submitted offers. They include a criterion that contractors shall have their executive management struc-

tures in the EU or an associated country, must not be controlled by a third country, should use facilities and resources located in the EU and that the products should not be subject to any restrictions defined by third countries. These criteria need to allow for exceptions in cases where no European company is able to produce a weapon system in the desired quality. Companies from allied third countries should thus be invited to participate in the tender, but priority be given to EU contractors.

1.5. Summary Statement: What makes it Liberal?

While common security policies have recently regained traction among Member States, procurement still largely depends on the goodwill of Member States and lacks a long-term perspective. This proposal maps a foresighted vision and comprehensive approach to create more efficiency, competition and innovation in the defence industry through institutionalised common development and procurement. Liberal values manifest in transparent stakeholder engagement, nimble administration and the removal of remaining barriers to the single market, ensuring equal market access for all companies regardless of nationality or size, and thus guaranteeing the functionality of market forces. European security will be bolstered through better interoperability and an enhanced industrial base in the defence sector. In the wake of current security challenges in Europe, it is more important than ever for the EU to focus on common action. This new step in European integration will strengthen Europe's military capabilities and allow the EU to respond to any security challenges at home whilst also becoming a more reliable partner to our democratic allies around the globe.

2. SOUTHEAST AND EAST EUROPE

Bridging the Distance: Localising the EU

By *Sorcha Ní Chonhaile & Alexia Petrovai*

2.1. Background

While the European Union has expanded its membership significantly since its foundation, there is still a notable East-West divide that can be observed across Member States today. According to opinion polls and spurred by scandals such as double standards in food quality in Eastern European markets, Eastern Europeans at times feel like second-class Europeans. This feeling is even more apparent in EU candidate countries that oftentimes have to wait for decades for meaningful progress in their accession process. The image of the EU institutions in “Brussels’ ivory tower”, detached from European citizens’ reality, provides populist actors in accession states with a welcome narrative to demonise the EU. In order to counter these narratives and keep candidate countries on their pro-EU course, Eastern European countries that have already been admitted to the EU can play an essential bridge-building role. By moving the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR) to Romania, this proposal seeks to combat anti-EU narratives, decentralise EU representation, promote EU identification among Eastern Europeans and send a strong signal of support to accession countries and those in the Eastern Partnership.

As an Eastern European country that has already been admitted to the EU and undergone the lengthy accession process, Romania can play an essential bridge-building role in keeping the candidate countries engaged on their pro-European pathway. For accession states, Romania offers a high relatability and signal of hope. During its own accession process, the country had to overcome significant obstacles in the fields of rule of law, the judiciary and corruption. Even after its accession, Romania required monitoring in these fields by the European Commission. In addition, Romania had long been one of the poorest countries in Europe, not least due to its corruption and political instability issues. However, since it joined the bloc in 2007, the country has undergone a remarkable transformation. In 2023, it is set to outpace neighbouring countries like Hungary and Bulgaria and become the second largest economy after Poland in the Central & Eastern Europe region. With good relations with Brussels and on its way to end the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism, Romania can serve as a good example of democratic transformation in the region. Additionally, Romania has been a strong proponent of the EU Eastern Partnership (EaP) and made the EaP’s future a priority in its 2019 EU Council Presidency. A more recent example of Romania’s role in the Eastern Partnership is its close ties with Moldova. Based on cultural and historic ties, Romania has been a staunch supporter of the new EU candidate country.

Moldova has become an important strategic asset in the European security environment, since Russia’s war of aggression in Ukraine and the EU has since enabled additional funds for the Interreg NEXT cross-border cooperation programme 2021-2027 between Romania and the Republic of Moldova. Overall, Romania is predestined to host DG NEAR, as a window into the transformative opportunities that the EU offers and as the EU’s mediator into the Eastern European region and the Western Balkans.

2.2. Project Objectives/Impact

The objective of moving DG NEAR to Romania is to counter the perception of the EU as a detached Western European institution, to decentralise EU representation and increase EU identification among Eastern Europeans. While the move may seem a minor step, it would have a meaningful impact on the candidate countries, as well as the EU’s relationship with neighbouring partners. It signifies not only a physical but also an organisational move and, therefore, renewed commitment to engage with these countries eye-to-eye, based on shared values and a common vision of increased prosperity. Romania, as an EU Member State, has geographical importance concerning accession candidate states, and provides a concrete example of the success, which comes post accession to the EU.

In addition, this proposal will positively affect the EU’s Eastern Partnership. The partnership is designed to strengthen the political and economic relations between the EU, its Member States and the six partner countries¹, as well as support sustainable reform processes in the partner countries. Since its creation in 2009, however, the project has faced shortcomings in providing an effective strategic outlook and countering Russia’s influence in the region. With Russia waging war in Ukraine, partner countries of the EaP are re-evaluating their dependency on Russia. By moving DG NEAR closer to our partners, strengthening the sense of belonging to the EU and showing renewed commitment to a strong partnership with Eastern Partnership countries, we can harness this renewed potential to boost democratic developments and liberal values in Eastern Europe.

Eventually, Romania’s former commitment during its EU Council presidency to create a new strategic outlook for the EaP may also be revisited as part of this move and the consequent revival of the EaP. This could lead to a new assessment for improved possibilities to engage with partners in the EU neighbourhood.

¹ It is relevant to note, that the cooperation with Belarus, albeit being in the EU Eastern Partnership, is currently on hold.

2.3. Stakeholders

The power to relocate a specific Directorate-General, such as DG NEAR, typically lies with the President of the European Commission and the College of Commissioners. The President, in consultation with other members of the Commission, can make decisions regarding the internal organisation, structure and location of directorates based, for example, on administrative needs or policy priorities.

2.4. Main Provisions

The power to relocate a specific Directorate-General, such as DG NEAR, typically lies with the President of the European Commission and the College of Commissioners. The President, in consultation with other members of the Commission, can make decisions regarding the internal organisation, structure and location of directorates based, for example, on administrative needs or policy priorities.

DG Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations is currently based in Brussels and has approximately 1,650 staff members in Brussels and in the EU Delegations in partner countries. It will be necessary to set up a strategy for the relocation of Brussels staff, the building rent or acquisition of property in Bucharest, as well as relevant agreements with the local government, all in line with the EU's regulation. However, those infrastructure costs are significantly lower in Bucharest than in Brussels and the political benefits outweigh the costs of the move.

An important aspect to keep in mind is the award of contracts of higher value for the provision of public goods and services, as they must be fair, equitable, transparent and non-discriminatory. That way, any challenges regarding the risk of corruption are intercepted. Relevant directives for these procurement processes are:

- Directive 2009/81/EC on the coordination of procedures for the award of certain works contracts, supply contracts and service contracts by contracting authorities or entities in the fields of defence and security;
- Directive 2014/23/EU on the award of concession contracts;
- Directive 2014/24/EU on public procurement.

Other institutions will need to be involved to ensure that this move has support and does not become an exception, more so the ideal. There will also be close collaboration with local authorities on management of the added stress that will be put on the Romanian capital, thereby ensuring fast and smooth relocation.

2.5. Summary Statement: What makes it Liberal?

Decentralisation is at the heart of liberal EU politics. By delivering the opportunity for institutions to engage with the communities who can benefit from greater engagement with the EU, in this case DG NEAR, the EU becomes a visual reality to those who feel disconnected from the daily workings of the Union's institutions. This move will make the EU a more credible actor with regard to its Eastern partners and accession states, help boost a pro-EU narrative against the growth of anti-EU sentiment and promote liberal values and identification with the EU among Eastern Europeans.

3. MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

Mobile Legal Aid Clinic & Professional Empowerment Programme

By Nabila Arab

3.1. Background

Unrest in the Middle East has led to an increase in irregular immigration into the EU. One affected country in this context is Lebanon, which has faced significant challenges in recent years. Political instability and economic crises are exacerbated by the lack of job opportunities and economic prospects. Syrian refugees constitute an especially vulnerable population in this case. There are an estimated 1.5 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon, of whom more than 800,000 are not registered as refugees by the Lebanese government², which suspended official registration in 2015. 99% of Syrian refugee households are currently unable to provide food or medication for their families. Unable to access neither regular migration pathways nor refugee processes, many Syrians in Lebanon therefore increasingly resort to dangerous irregular migration to Europe.

The *Mobile Legal Aid Clinic & Professional Empowerment Programme* seeks to provide a three-tiered approach to the issue of irregular migration. It will offer legal assistance, oftentimes create lacking awareness through an online platform on the risks and dangers of irregular migration among Syrian refugees in Lebanon and offer skill capacity training programmes that align with European job market requirements to make participants eligible for skilled labour migration. Over the past year, a variety of EU countries have introduced new immigration and work visa schemes, aimed at facilitating access to job-seekers from abroad that meet their country's labour needs. The variety and complexity of these schemes, however, leave many potential labour migrants unable to apply. The *Mobile Legal Aid Clinic* will address this issue and offer a one-stop-shop solution. It will work with these EU countries to provide potential labour migrants with the relevant information and match them up with training programmes to help them achieve the relevant EU-approved professional certification, as part of the pre-visa application process. Lebanon will serve as a pilot country for this approach. Through this cooperation, the EU will not only support legal and safe pathways to immigration and support Lebanon in the management of its migration crisis but also create a vetted system to match Member States' needs for skilled labour that can only be met by labour migration.

3.2. Project Objectives/Impact

The main objective of the proposal is to address irregular migration among Syrian refugees from North Lebanon (a hub for irregular migration) to Europe. The project aims to significantly reduce irregular migration by offering refugees safe and legal alternatives. The *Mobile Legal Aid Clinic* will offer free legal assistance, information and guidance on legal migration processes and documentation requirements. This will be complemented by the availability of in-person visits and awareness sessions on safe migration in irregular migration hubs, such as Tripoli.

The second objective is to raise awareness within refugee communities about the perils and complexities associated with irregular migration. Through targeted awareness campaigns and information dissemination, refugees will gain a better understanding of the risks involved in irregular migration and the importance of pursuing legal migration pathways instead. This objective not only discourages irregular migration but also empowers individuals to make informed decisions about their future. An **online platform** will provide access to information and resources, and will navigate potential labour migrants through the migration process more safely and efficiently.

Lastly, the project intends to enhance the employability of Syrian visa applicants by offering skilled capacity training programmes aligned with European job market requirements. By providing training, mentorship and accredited certifications, the proposal aims to improve the economic prospects of applicants, making them more competitive and desirable candidates on the European job market. To this end, migrants will have the opportunity to schedule skills assessments and consultation meetings. After the consultation, they will be matched to a **skill capacity training and mentoring programme**, sponsored by the receiving EU Member State.

3.3. Stakeholders

UN agencies (UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM, ILO) can provide valuable expertise, resources and coordination in implementing the proposal. They can help in facilitating international cooperation.

² Unregistered refugees are included in the term "refugee" throughout this proposal, as they are at least in part registered by Non-Governmental Organisations like the Red Cross or the UNHCR.

Similarly, **international NGOs (e.g. ICRC, Legal Action Worldwide)** will bring extensive experience in humanitarian and legal aid work. They can help to provide legal assistance, training and awareness campaigns within refugee communities. **Local NGOs (e.g. Lebanese Red Cross, INTERSOS)** have a strong presence on the ground in North Lebanon and can assist in programme delivery, community engagement and awareness campaigns tailored to the specific needs and cultural sensitivities of the refugee population.

Active involvement of the **refugee communities** themselves is vital. Their engagement helps shape the project to meet their specific needs and ensures that the awareness campaigns and training programmes are culturally sensitive and effective. At the same time, collaboration with the Lebanese government, through the **Ministry of Social Affairs**, is essential for ensuring legal compliance and facilitating the project's implementation. Governmental support can help streamline legal procedures for visa applicants.

European partners (EU Member States and industry associations) are essential for offering accreditation, job placement opportunities and financial support. Member States will benefit by not only relieving the economic, social and political stress of irregular immigration but also seizing the chance to satisfy their labour force shortage and boost their economic development. Their involvement ensures the alignment of the proposed training programmes with European job market requirements. To this end, EU Member States with relevant immigration and work visa schemes may create a consortium to engage in this project as partners and coordinate their needs as well. Together with **technical and vocational educational institutions (e.g. EU-recognised)**, they can deliver high-quality training programmes, aligned with industry standards, and offer recognised certifications that enhance refugees' employability in their countries.

The **final beneficiaries** of the proposal are primarily Syrian refugees residing in North Lebanon, who are often unregistered and in vulnerable situations. With their unclear status and lack of financial resources, they face limited legal options and fall prey to the risks associated with irregular migration routes. Through the three-tiered approach, they will be empowered to make informed decisions about their future, reducing their reliance on dangerous irregular migration. Through the acquisition of valuable skills, they will be able to apply as labour migrants, making them more competitive on the European job market, improving their economic prospects and offering an alternative path to self-sufficiency. Refugee communities in Lebanon will benefit from increased stability and cohesion as fewer community members embark on perilous journeys, leading to improved community well-being. As a result, the

broader MENA region will experience reduced migratory pressures, contributing to regional stability and lessening the potential for conflicts and crises.

3.4. Main Provisions

The first stage begins with a **comprehensive needs assessment** in North Lebanon, involving stakeholders such as UN agencies, international and local NGOs and governmental bodies. This assessment aims to understand the specific challenges faced by Syrian refugees and gather insights that will shape the project's design and address the identified needs effectively.

The project's second stage focuses on raising awareness within refugee communities about the dangers of irregular migration and the importance of pursuing legal alternatives. International and local NGOs play a central role in launching **targeted awareness campaigns**, while **legal assistance** is provided through our mobile clinics, offering guidance on legal migration processes.

At the same time, a user-friendly **online platform** will be developed. It will serve as a valuable resource hub and one-stop-shop, granting refugees access to information, support and resources for legal migration processes.

The fourth stage involves designing and implementing **skills development programmes** aligned with European job market requirements. Under the guidance of the European network of immigration liaison officers (ILO network), EU Member States with relevant immigration and work visa schemes will **form a consortium and delegate coordinators** to represent their interests in the development of the project. Technical and vocational educational institutions, European partners and governmental bodies will collaborate to deliver vocational training, mentorship and language proficiency courses. Each Member State and partner organisation (in the case of industry/employer associations) will provide participant thresholds and funding for programmes, based on their national needs. Partners may cooperate on the same programme, due to similar labour market needs, and therefore pool their funding. Partners will ensure that successfully trained and certified participants receive **job placements** in their country, as well as assistance in adjusting to new roles, ensuring the long-term integration and success of refugees in their new environments. Collaboration with relevant governmental bodies is crucial at this stage to **streamline legal procedures for refugees**. Advocacy for supportive policies that facilitate the integration of refugees who complete the training programmes is an essential

component of this process. Coordination with UN agencies and EU Member States strengthens the advocacy efforts. Throughout implementation, all stakeholders participate in applying a robust **monitoring and evaluation system**. This system assesses the impact of the project by continuously measuring key indicators, gathering feedback from participants and evaluating the effectiveness of the initiatives undertaken.

3.5. Summary Statement: What makes it Liberal?

This proposal represents a strategic and compassionate approach to addressing irregular migration among Syrian refugees in North Lebanon. By providing safe and legal alternatives, empowering vulnerable Syrian communities through education and skills development, and fostering regional stability, the proposal offers a comprehensive solution to a complex challenge. In particular, this initiative aligns perfectly with the EU's core values and objectives, emphasising human rights, humanitarianism and global leadership. By actively supporting this endeavour, the EU not only demonstrates its commitment to these values but also strengthens its partnerships with international organisations and reinforces its position as a responsible and influential global actor. Beyond its global impact, this proposal has the potential to significantly benefit the MENA region, by reducing migratory pressures, enhancing community stability and promoting cooperation among stakeholders. It serves as a model for addressing migration challenges humanely and sustainably, emphasising the EU's role as a positive force for change on the global stage. In embracing this liberal solution, the EU takes a meaningful step towards a more secure, interconnected and compassionate world.

4. SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

INVEST NOW INITIATIVE

By Racine Goulizan, Mariam Traoré & Laya Poudiogo Affoussata

4.1. Background

Africa is a geopolitical priority to the European Union. Not only do these two regions have a history of close economic, cultural and geographical ties, but they also have the opportunity to thrive through cooperation. In the wake of multiple global shocks, the African economy has proven its resilience and is projected to grow at the second-fastest rate in the world. This is also due to the immense potential for innovation, productivity and growth that African companies have brought to the table. However, despite all of the potential opportunities, major financing gaps remain. 90% of African businesses are small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and 40% of them have difficulty obtaining appropriate funding. Each year, this financing gap results in a loss of profit for the continent of 330 billion dollars and a plethora of innovative ideas that could find solutions to global challenges, like climate change, remain unrealised. At the same time, European investors, although interested, lack accessible mechanisms to support these smaller-scale projects.

INVEST NOW aims to solve this problem through a web-based micro-investment platform, connecting African SMEs with small and medium-sized European investors. The platform enables African entrepreneurs to present their projects and European investors to access opportunities, as well as to continuously monitor their investments through in-platform reporting mechanisms. The EU could play a crucial role in supporting this initiative, in line with its SME strategy, to foster innovation, economic growth and shared prosperity across continents.

4.2. Project Objectives/Impact

The key objective of the INVEST NOW project is to focus on building strong links between the EU and Africa, while stimulating entrepreneurship and innovation. The project will not only promote the creation of more jobs in the medium term in Africa, but will also contribute to the development of a more sustainable economy in the region in the long term. For the EU, this project will help to achieve its SME strategy. The support of African SMEs and knowledge exchange on mutually relevant innovation not only has the potential to innovate the European market, but may also lead to the development of products that can help tackle global challenges, like climate change, thereby positioning Africa and the EU as leaders in these endeavours.

Indicators of success will, for example, include the number of start-ups supported, investments leveraged, rate of job creation, start-up growth and transcontinental collaborations.

4.3. Stakeholders

The implementation of the INVEST NOW proposal will involve several key stakeholders, each of whom will play a crucial role in achieving the project objectives.

African start-ups will be able to access the funding they need to develop. Due to the level of political corruption in some African countries, (international) investment in SMEs is rare. INVEST NOW will offer vetted start-ups a status of verification that instils trust vis-à-vis international investors.

European investors will have the opportunity to invest in African SMEs and access the great innovation potential that lies therein. They may find solutions and products that are highly relevant to global issues, such as climate change, and that have great potential to transfer to European industry. They will therefore not only promote job creation and business growth in Africa, but also benefit the European market and support the EU in promoting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The **European Commission** may support this project under its *Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI)* funding mechanism. This project also allows the Commission to engage in knowledge transfer in accordance with its *SME Strategy for a Sustainable and Digital Europe*. In quarterly *SME Council* meetings, set up by the INVEST NOW team, the Commission engages in knowledge transfer with vetted SMEs and investors on promising SMEs tackling common challenges related to the SDGs. The Commission will be able to feed this knowledge back into its *European Digital Innovation Hubs*³ and to *Sustainability Advisors* and share its own projects/initiatives.

The Ministry of Communication and Digital Economy and the Ministry for the Promotion of Youth and Youth Employment of Ivory Coast will support this project as a pilot project in the country.

³ European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIHs) support companies and public sector organisations to become more competitive and to respond to digital challenges. Their network fosters networking, co-operation, and knowledge transfer between EDIH, SME and mid-caps, the public sector and the other relevant stakeholders and initiatives.

4.4 Main Provisions

The INVEST NOW implementation process is carefully designed to effectively involve all stakeholders by means of the following steps:

1. Apply for EU funding under the NDICI mechanism.
2. Gain support from the Ministry for Digital Economy and the Ministry for the Promotion of Youth and Youth Employment of Ivory Coast to start a national pilot project, subject to be expanded at a later stage.
3. Develop the INVEST NOW web platform with start-up filtering, tracking and selection capabilities. Involve technology experts to ensure usability and security.
4. Collaborate with African incubators and accelerators to identify and canvass promising start-ups. Organise awareness-raising sessions to explain the benefits of INVEST NOW.
5. Establish rigorous selection criteria for candidate start-ups. Implement a thorough verification process to guarantee the credibility and viability of projects.
6. Facilitate the registration of European investors on the platform. Gather information on their investment preferences and risk tolerance.
7. Use algorithms and experts to match investors to compatible start-ups. Provide detailed information to help investors make informed decisions.
8. Facilitate secure financial transactions between investors and start-ups via the platform. Ensure transparency of processes.
9. Provide investors with monitoring tools to track the progress of their investments. Send regular reports on start-up performance.
10. Collaborate with governments, financial institutions and international organisations to establish a favourable regulatory framework for cross-border investments.
11. Measure the impact of the initiative by tracking key indicators such as the number of start-ups supported, business growth and job creation.
12. Organise workshops and training for start-ups to strengthen their business and technological skills, thereby contributing to their long-term growth.
13. Facilitate training on smart investing for European investors, to provide them with knowledge and skills for high-return investments and strategies in the African context.

4.5. Summary Statement: What makes it Liberal?

INVEST NOW offers an innovative solution by connecting African start-ups to European investors, thereby fostering economic growth and innovation. The platform simplifies access to finance while offering diversified investment opportunities to individuals. This liberal approach, through free markets and competition, strengthens the ties between Europe and Africa, fostering sustainable economic development and reinforcing the EU's role as a committed global player.

5. SOUTH ASIA

QRATE

By Dr. Pragati Singh & Ferdous Alam

5.1. Background

Bilateral relations between South Asia and Europe have traditionally been strong due to cooperation on commercial, cultural and technological matters. However, in order to further improve the relationship between the EU and South Asia, future cooperation should go beyond these traditional corridors of cooperation. As a self-proclaimed beacon for human rights on the global scene, the EU seeks to promote these values in its international partnerships. While the EU has become a pioneer in advancing LGBTQIA+ rights at home, those groups still face discrimination and struggle for equitable treatment in many areas of life in South Asia.

One particular area of concern is access to appropriate healthcare for LGBTQIA+ people. In India, there is a lack of quality healthcare tailored to LGBTQIA+ needs. In many cases, doctors turn them away, and those that are willing to attend them lack the relevant training to deal with LGBTQIA+ health-related questions and procedures. QRATE seeks to build on the EU-funded pilot project Health4LGBT (2016-2018), aimed at reducing health inequalities experienced by LGBTQIA+ people. The QRATE web platform will tackle the aforementioned issues by providing training and certifications for practitioners and a registry for users. The knowledge exchange between the QRATE team and the Health4LGBT experts on training modules and implementation experience is a practical example of how the EU, as a beacon for human rights and normative power, can not only deliver blueprints but also actively support initiatives that promote human rights, de-stigmatisation and acceptance of LGBTQIA+ people across South Asia.

5.2. Project Objectives/Impact

QRATE is an impact start-up, building an ecosystem to improve quality healthcare accessibility for the LGBTQIA+ population in India by training health professionals and connecting them to clients through a peer-rated directory listing. Starting with a local pilot project, the goal is to be able to create a nationwide comprehensive listing of practitioners to reduce the gap in quality healthcare access for the queer population via:

1. training and sensitisation of health professionals;
2. certification and verification of service providers;
3. regularly updated list of approved services with client ratings;
4. direct booking through a customised platform with relevant filters.

Each of these four pillars of QRATE has directly measurable KPIs, which can be traced over a period of time as well as across geographies.

5.3. Stakeholders

Various **organisations focused on issues of health equity, women's rights and the LGBTQIA+ community** will be partners at various steps and stages of the project rollout.

Medical professionals and service providers will receive access to the QRATE provider portal in order to receive training and certification. Afterwards, they will feature as certified providers on the QRATE consumer portal. They will therefore be able to gain valuable skills as well as build trust with the LGBTQIA+ community to broaden their patient care. Once direct booking is enabled, they will also be able to manage bookings and conduct online consultations directly on the same portal.

Medical institutions/associations, such as the Indian Medical Association, Medical Students Association of India and the Delhi Medical Council will be partners in various capacities. They will be the certifying bodies for the training programmes and will provide input for the training material and ultimately authorise the material. Selected members will be appointed as trainers and consultants for imparting the curricula and will help spread the use of the QRATE platform in medical colleges.

The European Commission will support the effort through the provision of funding under the *Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument* (NDICI) instrument. Drawing on lessons from the Health4LGBT project, Health4LGBT officials will also provide guidance and training.

The **final beneficiaries** are LGBTQIA+ people in India, who will receive access to appropriate healthcare in the short-to-medium term and see a reduction in medical stigma in the medium-to-long term, which will hopefully generate momentum to replicate the project in other South Asian countries.

5.4. Main Provisions

Prior to this proposal, a small pilot study was executed in Delhi in 2021-2022. It collected currently available data on LGBTQIA+-friendly healthcare providers, curated by various community members over the years. Since then, available doctor's listings were updated and redundant entries/information eliminated.

Throughout this process, 10 professionals were interviewed on their interest and desire for a platform such as QRATE. They were also asked for their suggestions and feedback on the proposal. Their LGBTQIA+ sensitivity was assessed through a basic questionnaire. Additionally, two basic modules on LGBTQIA+ sensitivity training for medical students have already been developed and 15 doctors have been trained on them.

The next steps in the process will be as follows:

- 2023 - Application to EU funding
- 01/2024 - Collating and updating available service provider databases
- 03/2024 - Development/launch of first iteration of the web directory/listing with filters
- 03/2024 - Onboarding medical associations & Health4LGBTI via formal MoUs
- 06/2024 - Vetting and approval of initial modules by partnering medical institutions/associations
- 09/2024 - Development of additional modules with on-boarded stakeholders
- 12/2024 - Pilot trainings at a medical college in Delhi

Following successful implementation of QRATE for the LGBTQIA+ community, the platform can be expanded to address the healthcare needs of women.

5.5. Summary Statement: What makes it Liberal?

Access to quality healthcare for all people, regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, social status, religion, language, culture or nationality is a basic human right. The EU's support in advancing these rights will help the EU to become a credible global beacon of human rights. It ultimately has the chance to not just inspire but guide similar liberal solutions beyond India throughout the rest of South Asia.

6. SOUTHEAST AND EAST ASIA

CatalyZers: ASEAN Changemaker Ambassadors

By Delaina Dean & Nurilly Rania

6.1. Background

As Southeast Asia and Europe are becoming increasingly interconnected and their relationship more complex, cooperation and dialogue to enhance mutual understanding are vital. While there are increasing efforts at a political level to engage with Southeast Asian counterparts, it is important to recognise that democratic backsliding is a global issue that has been exacerbated by multiple crises over the past decade, including the global Covid-19 pandemic and conflicts. These challenges have emphasised the critical role of active and informed citizens in safeguarding and promoting democratic values and institutions. In this regard, ASEAN can draw valuable lessons and inspiration from the EU, which stands as the world's largest and most successful democratic cooperation of countries and a beacon for the global promotion of human rights.

To garner greater public backing for political cooperation and empower ASEAN citizens to promote democratic values, it is essential to promote action at grassroots level. The CatalyZer – ASEAN Changemaker Ambassadors project builds on existing initiatives such as the EU-ASEAN Young Leaders Forum and seeks to close the gap in the practical implementation of these dialogue activities. It addresses this gap by providing a holistic approach that combines awareness-raising campaigns, online training modules for the general public, as well as the chance to implement social journalism projects and engage in valuable knowledge exchange with European stakeholders as part of the ambassador programme. This comprehensive strategy ensures that dialogue leads to actionable outcomes, empowering young ASEAN individuals to become effective advocates, bridge builders and catalysts for change within their communities. The EU's involvement is vital in addressing this issue and ultimately strengthens its position as the global actor that engages with regional partners like ASEAN. In its unique role, the EU offers a value-based and more sustainable partnership alternative to other prominent actors, such as China, in the region. The promotion of cross-cultural exchange and projects further paves the way for increased mutual understanding and a new generation that strives for greater EU-ASEAN cooperation in the future.

6.2. Project Objectives/Impact

On an individual level, participants will gain knowledge, skills and cross-cultural understanding, becoming advocates and multipliers for positive change within their communities. The

social journalism projects and advocacy efforts will raise awareness within the community and inspire action on important issues around digital literacy, freedom of speech and participatory democracy, leading to tangible improvements in communities.

On a diplomatic level, this project aims to strengthen relations between ASEAN and the EU through enhanced dialogue, shared experiences and collaborative projects. As a global actor committed to promoting democracy, human rights and international cooperation, the EU's support in the funding and implementation of this project supports its aspiration as a normative power that promotes international dialogue. The project's focus on enhancing digital literacy, advocating for freedom of speech and participatory democracy aligns with the EU's commitment to shared values and principles, reinforcing its image as a partner in fostering democratic ideals, human rights and youth empowerment on the global stage, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals.

6.3. Stakeholders

Central to this endeavour are the **ASEAN Foundation (AF)** and **Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC) of the European Commission**, providing official endorsement, regional coordination and a platform for constructive dialogue. Their involvement ensures policy alignment, network access and credibility for cross-cultural collaboration. To ensure efficient knowledge sharing and the sustainability of EU youth programmes, the forum's participants will have the opportunity to serve as trainers, leveraging the knowledge and skills they acquire from the forum.

Youth organisations and civil society organisations (CSOs) will be valuable implementing partners throughout the project. They will share the online training courses as well as the project call to support participant recruitment. Successful applicants at the social journalism project stage will be paired up with a relevant youth or civil society organisation in their country, to receive valuable on-the-ground support, mentorship and access to the organisation's tools and community outreach.

Media partnerships with selected companies and networks will help to amplify public awareness and support, by driving the general public's attention to the online training modules and the target audience to the call for social journalism projects.

The **ultimate beneficiaries** are the Changemaker Ambassadors, who gain skills and perspectives, ultimately fostering cross-cultural understanding and advocacy within their communities. In turn, the local communities experience heightened civic engagement through access to the online training, awareness-raising campaigns and, ultimately, the social journalism projects. This will, in the medium term, result in a more democratically aware and active society and the overall promotion of democratic values in the region. Furthermore, the project's ripple effect will strengthen diplomatic ties between ASEAN and the EU whilst increasing global awareness.

6.4. Main Provisions

The initial stage will be the launch of the **"Education for Active Citizenship" short online learning programme**. A diverse group of ASEAN youth (aged 19-26) are selected through an open call application process. They undertake a comprehensive curriculum focused on ASEAN-EU relations, Digital Literacy and Advocacy, Freedom of Speech (Human Rights), as well as the relevant cultural, historic and political ASEAN environment to which these issues are subject. This curriculum sets the foundation for their roles as Changemaker Ambassadors. The initial stage will be accompanied by a social media campaign, drawing attention to the online training and issues covered.

During the second stage of the programme, participants are encouraged to submit **social journalism project proposals**. Ten proposals will be selected by a panel of three jury members, with representatives from DG EAC, AF and ASEAN Youth Organisation (AYO), a major CSO in the ASEAN region. They will then partake in a preparatory study tour in a European country, relevant to their proposed projects. During this visit, participants gain invaluable insight through first-hand experience of the democratic norms and cultures within the EU country to feed back into their proposals.

During the **"Project In Action" phase**, the participants implement their proposals over a six-month period, utilising social media platforms such as Instagram or Facebook, under the mentorship of a partnering youth or civil society organisation and a small stipend provided by the DG EAC and AF offices. Participants track and report project outcomes, assessing metrics such as viewer numbers, likes and engagement. They analyse whether there has been an increase in these indicators and whether their initiatives have indeed had a positive impact on their communities.

At the final **graduation ceremony** event, participants who have completed their projects are recognised and accepted into the prestigious **ASEAN-EU Youth Connects network**, which will also become an alumni network for future ASEAN-EU youth programmes beyond this project. By building this cross-regional youth network, members will be able to offer their skills and knowledge as speakers, facilitators or trainers for future programmes.

6.5. Summary Statement: What makes it Liberal?

The CatalyZers – ASEAN Changemaker Ambassadors programme represents a critical initiative aimed at strengthening the bonds between Southeast Asia and Europe while addressing the challenges of our times. It recognises the importance of active and informed citizens in upholding democratic values and institutions, drawing inspiration from the EU's successful model of democratic cooperation. This proposal embodies a liberal solution that underscores the EU's role in promoting human rights and democracy, as the young Changemaker Ambassadors contribute to their communities and amplify their voices through social journalism. Ultimately, this forward-thinking initiative not only benefits the ASEAN region but also exemplifies the EU's pivotal role in promoting positive change, cooperation and interconnectedness on a global scale.

7. NORTH AMERICA

Beyond Brussels & DC: Strengthening Transatlantic Partnership

By Sophie Holtzman & Cristina Turbatu

7.1. Background

The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine has highlighted the importance of a strong transatlantic alliance. For this partnership to effectively promote shared values globally, regardless of who sits in the White House or calls the shots in the EU, the transatlantic foundation must be strengthened – beyond the two capitals. The *Beyond Brussels & DC* political staffer exchange programme seeks to, on the one hand, strengthen awareness of the value of the transatlantic partnership and the need to promote it. This happens by experiencing the US and the EU outside of the political capitals, exchanging with peers and stakeholders, living up to shared values and exploring political realities as well as policy implications on both sides of the Atlantic. On the other hand, this project aims to tackle concrete obstacles in forming a stronger transatlantic alliance. Political polarisation is an issue that has been deeply affecting both the US and the EU internally, as well as their willingness to cooperate, depending on current leadership ideologies. Political polarisation therefore poses a threat to liberal democracies on both sides of the Atlantic and the future of the transatlantic alliance as a whole. The *Beyond Brussels & DC* programme aims at fostering dialogue across political aisles and beyond capitals. It seeks to create a new generation of staffers that promote democratic ideals and incentivise working across the aisle to create better policies for US and EU citizens, rather than playing into the sensationalism and political trench warfare that increased polarisation in the two regions today. To this end, the programme will include both Democrat and Republican staffers, as well as political staffers working in local/regional/national parliaments in EU Member States that have been experiencing increasing challenges in the field of political polarisation. To foster exchange beyond the programme, all participants will design and implement a follow-up project using their learnings at their respective political level (local/regional/state) to help tackle political polarisation and promote transatlantic ties, as part of their transition into the Alumni network.

7.2. Project Objectives/Impact

The overall objectives of the *Beyond Brussels & DC* staffer exchange programme are to raise awareness of the importance of the transatlantic alliance, take US-EU exchange beyond capitals and into the political reality of voters as well as combat political polarisation as a risk factor for EU-US liberal societies and as a risk factor for transatlantic relations.

The project will have impacts at different levels through a three-tiered approach: the exchange programme itself, as well as the community engagement aspect, will have a short- to medium-term impact, while the increased awareness of strong transatlantic partnership will manifest as a medium-term impact. Lastly, the generational shift among staffers and politicians, as well as the contribution to lessening political polarisation and increasing collaboration for a more representative democracy through their projects and participation in the Alumni network will be a long-term effect of the programme.

7.3. Stakeholders

The **Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. Department of State** will organise the exchange programme, together with the **Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture of the European Commission**. Both have expressed the importance of youth in shaping the democracies of tomorrow and have a vested interest in promoting this group through a variety of programmes. Both the EU and the US will benefit from this project in the long run, as it will strengthen the democratic backbone of their transatlantic alliance and counter the political polarisation that is currently threatening their political institutions and liberal values.

Political staffers from local, regional, state (US) and country (EU) level will participate in the programme. They will benefit from the acquired skills and exchanges with their peers that will empower them to become the next generation of pro-democratic actors in their countries and help promote policies of cooperation that benefit all citizens. Through genuine exchange with other staffers, they will broaden their horizons, create long-lasting relationships and become agents of change for political bridge-building within their communities and beyond.

NGOs, CSOs, think tanks, citizen engagement groups, political associations, industry and workers associations will act as stakeholders in the programme, showcasing their work and the political realities of a wide variety of citizens in an exchange with participants.

7.4. Main Provisions

At the **initial stage** of the programme, the U.S. Department of State and European Commission coordinators will select

three US cities for the first session of the exchange programme, as well as three EU locations for the second study trip. Political capitals, such as Brussels and Washington DC are excluded from the selection. After selecting the locations, meetings with relevant stakeholders (political associations, NGOs, CSOs, think tanks, industry and workers associations, citizen engagement groups, etc.), as well as a training module on comprehensive policy-making and political cooperation, will be organised for the programme. In addition, a lead facilitator will be brought in to design a preparation and wrap-up workshop. The lead facilitator will accompany the participants during the sessions and on their project implementation journey.

During the **launch stage**, the U.S. Department of State and European Commission will publish the call for participants on their respective channels (e.g. European Youth Portal) and **promote the call** through their media channels. In the U.S., the call will be promoted through the networks of the two main political parties, as well as alumni and project channels (e.g. the Fulbright Program) of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. In the EU, the call will also be shared with the European Network of Political Foundations, as well as the European political parties, to be passed down to their national members. All programme stakeholders will also be asked to share the call within their wider network. Political staffers between the ages of 18 and 30, working at local-, regional-, state-level (US) and national-level (EU) parliaments and with professional working proficiency in English knowledge are eligible under the call. In the pilot year, a total of 30 participants (15 US; 15 EU) will be **selected from all applications**. The selection will take into account political, gender and geographical distribution to ensure diversity in participation. In the following years, the number of participants can be increased. For the EU, participants from countries facing democratic backlash or increased political polarisation, as reported in the EU Rule of Law Report, will be prioritised. For the US, participants from swing states may be prioritised.

Selected participants will partake in **two online prep sessions** to get to know each other and cover the basic introduction to the programme. During the session, they will engage in facilitated break-out sessions to brainstorm their follow-up community engagement projects. As part of the programme, they will participate in **two 1-week study visits**: one to the three EU locations and one to the three US locations. At the end of the programme, each participant makes a concrete commitment through their **community engagement proposal**, depending on their political work level. This may include a project to influence their Member of Parliament (MP) and help influence the political debate (state/national level) or a local/regional community event (with their MP).

Following the successful completion of the programme, participants will enter the **Beyond Brussels & DC Alumni Network** and report on the progress of their community projects on a designated project website, with a separate intranet space for exchange between alumni. The U.S. Department of State and the European Commission will use the project in their individual, as well as in one joint, social media campaign. They

will further explore the possibility of a joint alumni conference, on the fringes of the next *Democracy Summit*, as the fight against political polarisation aligns with the goals of the new international alliance.

7.5. Summary Statement: What makes it Liberal?

The EU is a globally unique project that promotes peace, stability and cooperation. However, as liberals we believe that this mammoth task can only be tackled through effective international cooperation. In the global systemic competition between liberal democracies and authoritarian regimes, boosting the transatlantic alliance is therefore more important than ever. The *Beyond Brussels & DC* political staffer exchange programme will play an important role in shaping the next generation of political stakeholders and leaders, who will embrace political cooperation, fight polarisation and foster deeper transatlantic ties for the promotion of liberal values worldwide.

8. LATIN AMERICA

ECONectados

By Victoria María Werner Feijóo, Alma García, Gastón Joschua Zientarski & María Villacrés

8.1. Background

Latin America (LATAM) and the European Union (EU) are connected through historical, economic and cultural ties. Both regions seek to tackle common global challenges through joint responses. One of the most pressing global issues today is the fight against climate change. With its ambitious *European Green Deal*, the European Union has made this threat a priority across its policy areas, setting itself on a path to become the first climate-neutral continent. Beyond its own actions, the EU seeks to inspire and promote similar developments in other regions and has therefore made “Green Deals” and the support of sustainable initiatives a key pillar of its international partnership and funding.

Latin America faces the dire need to diversify its economy, reduce its dependence on non-renewable resources and adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change. While the EU has already established broader strategic partnerships on environmental topics with countries like Mexico and Bolivia, the *ECONectados* project considers a practical approach to boost energy transition in Latin America. According to the Inter-American Development Bank, the LATAM population produces almost 300,000 tons of organic waste per day, which could be used to support the growth of a sustainable energy sector in the region. *ECONectados* aims to promote the installation of biogas generation plants in LATAM. Local governments in Latin America will have the opportunity to connect with European companies and investors through a web platform, to facilitate green financing and knowledge exchange. As one of the most important economic partners for many LATAM countries, the EU has the chance to promote action in line with the *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs) and strengthen its role as a global sustainability champion.

8.2. Project Objectives/Impact

The main objectives of the project are to promote the installation of biogas generation plants and facilitate knowledge exchange between the EU and LATAM on energy transition. In doing so, energy efficiency, thanks to the re-utilisation of organic waste, will be increased and the environmental impact on landfills drastically reduced. This will not only generate cheaper energy for LATAM populations, but also support the development of cleaner and healthier cities. This project will further contribute to economic development for all parties involved. For EU stakeholders, *ECONectados* provides the opportunity for investment and innovation. Meanwhile, economic development in LATAM will be boosted through not only the investment itself, but also a projected rise in employment rates through the construction and operation of biogas plants.

8.3. Stakeholders

Local governments will be able to communicate their financial requirements to build biogas plants through the web platform. This governance level is crucial in bypassing the issue of corruption in several LATAM states at national government level. Local governments are well-suited to assess the needs and potential of their communities and to develop medium- to long-term strategic planning in the field of energy efficiency.

European companies/funding organisations with green capital will gain access to investment opportunities and the exchange of best practices through the portal. This will promote not only economic development, but also innovation in the EU.

EU and LATAM local organisations and initiatives working on energy transition will be able to access the web platform’s knowledge-sharing hub. They can then participate in quarterly digital *EU Green Deal sessions*, hosted by the European Commission, as well as in bi-monthly *best-practice sessions*, which will invite European and Latin American members of the network to share and discuss new and innovative ways to address energy transition.

The European Commission will be able to use the platform to address relevant stakeholders in its own initiatives and regulations regarding energy efficiency and transition. This is also an opportunity to bring in members of the EU *Modernisation Fund*, which supports 10 lower-income EU Member States in their transition to climate neutrality. It will also generate valuable input from implementing partners in the EU and LATAM on the ground, to assess the effects of these provisions and feed them back into the legislative/regulatory process.

The ultimate beneficiaries of the project are the residents who receive discounted energy and enjoy cleaner and healthier cities and towns. Moreover, the project will also generate jobs in the construction and operation of biogas production plants, thus contributing to local economic development and employment rates.

8.4. Main Provisions

To ensure comprehensive project design and gradual execution, the following implementation steps will be put in place:

1. application for an EU NDICI grant (possibly HORIZON);
2. pilot test in Argentina, Mexico, and Ecuador;

3. inception workshop with the European Commission, to align goals and tools;
4. creation of a database with potentially interested parties, using efficient data collection and management tools;
5. establishment of specific criteria for selecting companies, organisations, and local governments that may be interested in joining the platform;
6. design and development of the website interface and knowledge-sharing tools;
7. testing phase;
8. platform launch;
9. promotion through traditional media, social networks, and stakeholder associations;
10. scheduling of quarterly EU Green Deal sessions with the Commission for current project cycle;
11. launch a call in the network and scheduling of bi-monthly best-practice sessions;
12. creation of awareness campaigns for citizens;
13. establishment of a monitoring and evaluation system for impact assessment.

8.5. Summary Statement: What makes it Liberal?

As an aspiring leader in green transition, the EU is a valuable partner for Latin America in its own ambitions to tackle some of the most pressing environmental issues of our time. *ECOnectados* links the two regions' common interests in promoting energy transition, economic development and knowledge exchange. As liberals, we believe in seeking answers to global challenges through international cooperation, emphasising the role of decentralised action through local governments, as well as promoting innovation and economic opportunities through free markets and competitiveness. *ECOnectados* encompasses all of these aspects, by bringing LATAM and EU stakeholders together to finance energy efficiency in LATAM and promote common innovation and economic strength through exchange for a more sustainable future.

Hackathon Winners

EUROPEAN DIALOGUE



Nico Stein

Nico Stein is a passionate student currently pursuing a degree in Political Science at the Technical University of Munich (TUM). His academic journey has primarily centered around the topics of International Relations, Security, and Defence Studies. His main interest lies in understanding the dynamics of global security and international relations. These studies have equipped him with a profound understanding of the challenges and complexities inherent in today's security and defence landscape, with a particular focus on European Defence and nuclear deterrence. He works every day to promote freedom, democracy, and a stronger Europe.



Silvio Junger

Silvio Junger is currently pursuing a degree in Economics and Politics in Vienna. His political journey began in September 2022 when he joined LYMEC as an Individual Member. Later in December 2022, he became a member of JUNOS, where he contributes to the international orientation of JUNOS as member of the international team. He frequently participates in events such as Policy Hackathons, exchanges, and political gatherings organized by LYMEC and other European liberal parties. These experiences have allowed him to collaborate with people from across Europe, all working together to forge a shared sense of European identity.

SOUTHEAST AND EAST EUROPE



Sorcha Ní Chonghaile

Sorcha Ní Chonghaile is a graduate of Global Citizenship Education, now working in Brussels as a teacher. She started her journey in politics as a teenager through the student union movement and became active in the political party, Fianna Fáil, and its youth party, Ógra Flanna Fáil. Currently Sorcha serves as Vice President and International Officer for Ógra Fianna Fáil Party. She is committed to improving the experience of youth in Ireland and Europe. Sorcha is a firm believer that the human connection between European citizens is going to be the strength of our union going into the future.



Alexia Petrovai

Alexia Petrovai is a general medicine student and President of the local political youth organization (USR Tineret Cluj) in Romania. She started her journey in politics when she was 18 and she has not looked back since. Alexia is a strong believer in common ground. She is convinced that a stronger Europe is a plan we must all work towards.

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA



Nabila Arab

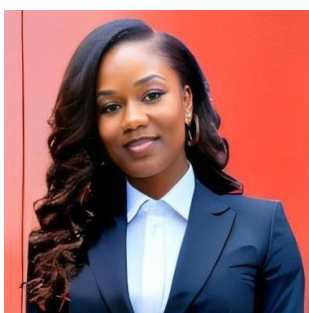
Nabila Arab is a MEPI Tomorrow's Leaders Graduate Scholar, currently pursuing an MA in Migration Studies. She completed her BA in Social Work and Community Development with a Minor in Arabic Language and Literature with distinction. She's an alumna of the student leaders exchange program at Georgetown University, supported by the U.S. Department of State, and received the Torch Award for showing great leadership and service spirit. She was also honoured with the Community Service and Volunteering Award at LAU. Her accomplishments extend to winning national debating competitions. As the Lebanon Hub coordinator for Alsharq international NGO, she's deeply committed to change.

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA



Mariam Traoré

Mariam Traoré, a 27-year-old student, obtained her bachelor's degree in Network and Computer Security in 2019. She is currently pursuing her Master 2 in Business and Digital Communication at the Université Virtuelle de Côte d'Ivoire. As well as her studies, Mariam is passionate about football, where she also works as a referee. She is currently doing an internship at Orange Digital Center as part of the validation of her master's degree. Her ambition is to become a leader in the field of digital communication, while contributing to technological development in Côte d'Ivoire.



Poudiougou Laya Afoussata

Poudiougou Laya Afoussata, a dynamic 22-year-old student, is currently pursuing a Master 2 in Business and Digital Communication at the Université Virtuelle de Côte d'Ivoire. Her academic career began with a degree in Applications Development and E-services, before specialising in digital communication. Passionate about creating user interfaces (UI/UX), she excels as a UI/UX Designer, front-end developer and community manager. Her main aim is to design innovative digital experiences, not only for her country, Côte d'Ivoire, but also beyond its borders, helping to shape a user-friendly digital future thanks to her diverse range of skills.



Racine Goulizan

Racine Goulizan, 19, is currently in her second year of computer science. Her career has been deeply marked by an unwavering passion for the digital world, art and literature. Always on the lookout for new knowledge, she is constantly seeking and seizing opportunities to broaden her horizons and explore the world of technology, creativity and knowledge.

SOUTH ASIA



Dr. Pragati Singh

Dr. Pragati Singh is a health professional, researcher, social entrepreneur, and an internationally renowned sexual and reproductive health and rights changemaker. She is known for her unique initiatives in niche fields, such as Indian Aces: India's first initiative working towards asexuality, HumansOfQueer.com: a platform for LGBT+ people's stories, PanACEa: Asexuality Asia Conference; PLatonicity.co: Matchmaking for nonsexual alliances, and more. She's been recognized globally, and was also featured in the BBC's list of 100 most inspiring, innovative, and influential women from around the world in 2019. Her works have been published internationally and she is now writing her first book.



Ferdous Alam

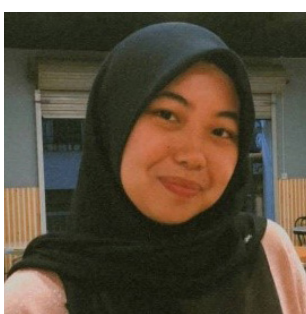
Ferdous Alam possesses deep expertise in machine learning and data engineering, vital for creating and expanding the QRATE. His extensive academic background and practical experience enable him to seamlessly connect theory with real-world applications. After earning a master's degree in Economics from Texas Tech University, Ferdous pursued a Master's in Data Science from UC Berkeley and completed a Business Analytics program at Harvard. With over fifteen years of experience working with unstructured data sets and data modeling, he excels in transforming complex data into actionable insights.

SOUTHEAST AND EAST ASIA



Dean Delaina Denis Ejoh

Dean Delaina Denis Ejoh is an inspiring individual with a deep commitment to animal welfare and is actively involved with Labuan Stray Free to promote animal welfare. She is also passionate about promoting equality in education, recognizing its transformative power. As a dedicated social entrepreneur, Dean combines her passion for animal welfare and education to implement innovative solutions to address social challenges. Her unwavering commitment exemplifies her drive to contribute to a more compassionate and inclusive society.



Nurilly Rania Jusly

Nurilly Rania Jusly is a passionate teacher with a love for languages, nature and technology. With a strong belief in global digitalization, she is actively developing her IT skills to empower underserved and rural communities through technology in education. As an advocate for environmental conservation, particularly in Sabah, Malaysia, she is dedicated to combating biodiversity loss through climate education and innovative solutions. She recognizes the crucial role of teachers in imparting this knowledge to future generations.

LATIN AMERICA



Alma Sarahí García Chávez

Alma Sarahí García Chávez is a 23-year-old Mexican student currently in the process of obtaining her degree in International Relations from the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences at UNAM. Alma also has a technical degree in Human Resources Administration. She has collaborated on the creation of a few academic collective books such as "Faces in the Darkness: Hospitals". Currently, she works as a teacher's assistant. Her research focuses on topics such as public international law, international human rights, international negotiations, cooperation, and international tourism.



Gastón Joschua Zientarski

Gaston Zientarski comes from Cochabamba, Bolivia and has a Bachelor in Legal Sciences. He is passionate about learning, volunteering and activism. He is the former President of Club LEO Cochabamba (Lions Club International Youth Program) and Rotaract Club Cochabamba (Rotary International Youth Program), current Curator of Global Shapers Hub Cochabamba (World Economic Forum Initiative), Social Co-Director of the Latin-German citizen diplomacy network Junges Netzwerk and Youth Ambassador for Bolivia of Youth & Democracy in the Americas, among others. He has dedicated much of his work to the construction and implementation of youth spaces for political and public participation and advocacy.



Victoria María Werner Feijóo

Victoria Werner is a 22 years old student from Buenos Aires, Argentina, studying Political Science. She enjoys reading, riding horses and learning languages. Victoria currently works as a Research Assistant at Princeton University. Her dream is to be able to pursue a Master's degree in Public Policy and start a career in the private sector to address social and environmental issues.



María Virginia Villacrés

María Virginia Villacrés is an internationalist from the International University of Ecuador (UIDE). She has served as assistant editor of the Global Panorama Bulletin and IR-FORO that provide space for discussion on foreign policy, international relations and international economics. She is a member of the International Relations Laboratory of UIDE, from where she has managed international cooperation and participated in the development of events that seek to promote democracy and dialogue on Ecuador's foreign policy. Currently, María is a project analyst at the international consulting firm, Insuco, and participates in the development of local social projects.

NORTH AMERICA



Cristina Turbatu

Cristina Turbatu is originally from Romania, but her childhood and formative years were spent in Bavaria, Germany. In 2017, she moved to Berlin to pursue her studies in law. Following her 2021 graduation with a bachelor's degree in law from Universität Potsdam in 2022, Cristina earned her master's degree in Media and Digital Cultures from Maastricht University. Presently, she works full-time as a policy advisor to a liberal member of parliament. Cristina's involvement with the liberal party's youth commenced in 2018, and since early 2020, she has served as a board member of the Junge Liberale Berlin. In November 2022, she was elected as the new chairwoman of the Junge Liberale Berlin.



Sophie Holtzman

Sophie Holtzman was raised in Kentucky, but currently lives and studies in Washington D.C. She got her start in politics while interning for the Northern Kentucky Democratic Party and serving as the Kentucky Youth and Government Secretary of State throughout high school. After moving to DC to study International Affairs and Journalism at the George Washington University, she had the opportunity to explore all sides of politics through internships, jobs, and speaking engagements. Sophie serves as the President of BridgeGW, a multipartisan discussion organization. She currently works in Global Public Affairs. After her studies she hopes to transition to a career in sustainability reporting.

