7. Synergies and Trade-Offs

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Four rounds of polling, some 200 interviews and six analytical chapters later, what are we to conclude about the voices of young Europeans? Young Europeans do not speak with a single voice. In producing this report we have listened to the ways in which they agree and disagree, on principles as well as on practices. What people express as aspirations in interviews, for example, does not always receive confirmation in the polls. We have to acknowledge unresolved trade-offs in the polyphony of voices. Yet we have also discovered multiple instances of generational unity among young Europeans' concerns. This final chapter synthesises some of the report's findings and looks into three domains of interaction—the implications of free movement, the unity of social and environmental Europe, and Europe as a community of values in a changing world—drawing out synergies and tensions in what young Europeans want.

Free movement: "a huge window"

As we have seen from multiple rounds of polling, young Europeans consider the freedom of movement as a primary benefit of EU citizenship. We learned from our December 2020 results that 74% of all European citizens believe that the EU "would not be worth having" without free movement. Chapter 1 suggested that we might consider free movement as young Europeans' corollary experience to an older generation's sense of freedom in 1989; Chapter 2 charted the arc through which freedom of movement transitioned from a means to an end in itself—indeed, a right.

We heard in one interview that free movement "has opened up a huge window".[286] This "huge window" not only provides personal benefits but also shapes how young Europeans understand Europe and its institutions. As another interviewee pithily put

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[286] Europe's Stories, "Interview with (name withheld)", *europeanmoments.com*, 2020, https://europeanmoments.com/interviewees/copywriter.

it, free movement is "one of the biggest aims in our common European history".[287] Free movement is, in one sense, a legal right distributed by the European Union and the national governments. In another sense, it is a window into what young Europeans assume about the ends and means of the EU, and seek to change in its institutions. The right of free movement has brought about a decades-long, endogenous process in the evolution of European society.

The significance of free movement does not dispel all tensions—about costs and benefits, or about movement internal and external to the EU. The first set of trade-offs pertains to the goals of material redistribution, for which young Europeans show significant commitment. Chapter 3, for example, shows that young Europeans are more positive about the immigration of non-EU citizens into their home countries, and suggests the strengthening of policies such as Erasmus and DiscoverEU to address the East–West divide inside Europe. But redistributive policies have to work within tight budgetary constraints—there will always be aspects of exclusion to any programme of redistribution. Borders have historically mediated these trade-offs, and young Europeans' relative indifference towards national borders or an external border does not solve this problem. If we are to ambitiously imagine the future of redistribution in Europe, as this report suggests in the form of Europe-wide welfare policies, we will have to grapple even more with the trade-offs that inhere with departing from traditional understandings of borders—on the national, regional and global scale.

Free movement does not simply flatten identities, individual and collective. A second set of trade-offs relates to competing solidarities in the context of free movement. While young Europeans tend to be more comfortable with multiple layers of identity and citizenship, our polling shows that there remains significant diversity in experiences of free movement—notably, between age groups and countries. The rise of fake news highlights just one tension between freedom of movement and social solidarity. While one interviewee suggests the benefits of increased mobility—"they do not need the media or someone's stories to make their opinion, they just go and see"—young Europeans have also witnessed the surge in disinformation that can accompany physical and digital exchange.[288] Too uniform an approach to—and celebration of—free movement may further aggravate the tensions between diverse experiences of European integration and even encourage backlashes. The key challenge here is to accommodate the diversity of perspectives while building on free movement as an indispensable and formative moment for a generation of young Europeans.

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[287] Europe's Stories, "Interview with János Kele", *europeanmoments.com*, 2020, https://europeanmoments.com/interviewees/janos.

[288] Europe's Stories, "Interview with Olga Tsuprykova", *europeanmoments.com*, 2020, https://europeanmoments.com/interviewees/olga.

"A social and environmental Europe"

One interviewee spoke thus about the significance of climate action: "A real social and environmental Europe would be achieved then."[289] This invocation points us to a second domain—a Europe that is *both* social and environmental—in which young Europeans' voices resound in synergy. We heard in another interview about the need to develop "a strategy on combatting climate change that also brings about a better life within the EU in other areas of life."[290] Our March 2020 poll highlights that most Europeans want the EU to be carbon-neutral by 2030, and Chapter 4 in this report further documents young Europeans' desire for norm-setting institutions and urgent action.[291] The same poll shows that 71% of Europeans are in favour of introducing a universal basic income, and Chapter 4 details attitudes towards labour-market policies. In particular, young Europeans want to combine targeted action on climate change and job security with principles of equality and social solidarity. They are more likely to emphasise issues of gender equality, the rights of minorities and protection against discrimination.

National governments have so far dominated the creation and operation of welfare states, but our findings and analysis point to the potential in rethinking welfare on the supranational and subnational scales. We have suggested that this is a fruitful time to consider a modern European welfare state; in the case of climate action, we have also advocated for budget lines that are specific to local and regional governments. Social and environmental policies at these different levels of government, in partial autonomy from each other but also in synergy, may be crucial to making progress on job creation and the green transition.

"A real social and environmental Europe would be achieved then"

And yet there remain questions to be asked about the unity of social *and* environmental Europe. The 2020 Standard Eurobarometer found that 49% of Europeans aged 15–24 would like the largest part of the EU budget to be spent on employment and social affairs, whereas 48% would prioritise climate change. That these are the two top priorities is apparent, but how would young Europeans evaluate the trade-offs? While the urgency of climate action can be observed among young Europeans, the need for job creation and security is likely to increase dramatically in the wake of the pandemic. The goal of net zero by 2050—not to mention 2030—will have major implications for the structure of European society and economy. Targeted policies to decrease the negative environmental impact of agriculture and aviation, to

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[289] Europe's Stories, "Interview with Sophie Wolter", *europeanmoments.com*, 2020, https://europeanmoments.com/interviewees/sophie.

[290] Europe's Stories, "Interview with Antonia Zimmermann", *europeanmoments.com*, 2020, https://europeanmoments.com/interviewees/antonia.

[291] Garton Ash and Zimmermann, 6 May 2020.

cite just two proposals, will benefit and harm different interest groups. Even in the most benign trajectory of the green transition, we must anticipate backlashes. These trade-offs will play out not only between environmental and social priorities, but also across short-, medium- and long-term strategies. So will social and environmental Europe, a linked core aspiration of young Europeans, hold together in the years to come?

A further set of difficulties resides in the institutional implications of bringing about a social-environmental Europe. Our March 2020 poll revealed the striking result that the majority of young Europeans believe that authoritarian governments are better equipped than democracies to tackle the climate crisis.[292] Even though young Europeans show strong support for liberal democracy at the national level, they appear to evaluate the legitimacy of European institutions in terms of performance rather than procedure. While this poll does not imply a wish for European institutions to become authoritarian, it does suggest a set of shifting and sometimes conflicting dynamics in how young Europeans relate to democratic processes. What threshold of poor performance in terms of social and environmental policy would discredit European institutions in the eyes of the young? Even if the European Green Deal is effective in moving towards net zero by 2045, how can it be deemed to succeed while also handing out enormous sums to member states that are eroding liberal democracy at home? To what extent is the existing economic and financial system compatible with our description of what young Europeans want?

A community of values in a changing world

Everyday life in Europe is permeated by external elements. These relations with the wider world shape every sphere that this report has analysed—including the future of free movement, democracy in member states and the fiscal basis of social Europe. Is there a trade-off between young Europeans' emphasis on Europe as a community of values and their indifference to foreign policy in general and the EU's superpower aspirations in particular? Chapter 7 points out that the EU has in the past been conceived of as the "anti-geopolitical actor *par excellence*". Our polling suggests that most young Europeans would want a coherent foreign policy at the EU level. But they do not, on the whole, prioritise foreign policy or consider it necessary for the EU to position itself as a superpower. Young Europeans have a strong desire for the EU to stand for liberal, open and egalitarian values. But can such strategic autonomy be achieved without the border control, foreign policy and armed force associated with superpower status? Will we witness a progressive decline in Europe's global influence, and even its ability to stand for its values?

These questions cannot be answered in this report—our task has been to foreground and frame them, but they will require the energies of Europeans, younger and older, in the years to come. As we heard in one interview: "We are now in the struggle of preserving what we feel excited about in Europe in a world which is rapidly changing

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[292] Garton Ash and Zimmermann, 6 May 2020.

and provides a lot of avenues for contestation."[293] By broadening the frame from the traditional areas of foreign and security policy to the context of Europe in a changing world, the next major focus of the Dahrendorf Programme's work will dive deeper into the possibilities and synergies in Europe's external relations. The preceding chapters have alluded to two such possibilities that would merit further discussion: first, on the basis of most Europeans' indifference or aversion towards military power, the construction of a consensus on Europe as a civilian superpower, and second, given the primacy of social and environmental issues for young Europeans, the development of the EU as a green superpower.

A message to the EU

We have now reflected upon synergies and tensions. There is no way to capture, in a single way, what young Europeans have to say to the EU. One contribution of our polling and interviews has precisely been to present the diversity and texture within a generation—and within the complex relations among European institutions, member states and their constituencies. Such diversity bears witness to the fact that the EU is now part of a mature political system, brought about by long-term institutional formation. European institutions reflect where we are just as much as where we wish to be. Our March 2021 polling suggests that young people, compared to older Europeans, remain optimistic about European integration. But one expert interviewee puts it more cautiously: "The most important thing that the European Union should achieve in 2030 is to stay together."[294] At a time when its very institutional existence may not be taken for granted, the EU cannot afford to squander the goodwill of young Europeans. Building on our findings and the preceding chapters, we conclude with the following calls for the EU to consider.

> **"The most important thing that the European Union should achieve in 2030 is to stay together"**

What should the EU do? Deliver competently and promptly on promises. In her 2021 Dahrendorf Lecture, Catherine de Vries expanded upon the benchmark theory of public opinion towards European integration, and in particular, the "EU differential" that describes the comparative advantages of EU membership.[295] The execution of the Covid-19 vaccine rollout has exposed the incompetence of EU institutions—in a dual sense, their limited scope in a multi-layered system and their underwhelming performance. This episode has a broader lesson, which resonates with young Europeans' understanding of legitimacy: European institutions must first prioritise

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[293] Garton Ash *et al.*, 25 May 2021; Europe's Stories, "Interview with Hartmut Mayer", *europeanmoments.com*, 2020, https://europeanmoments.com/stories/hartmut-mayer.

[294] Europe's Stories, "Interview with Ivan Krastev", *europeanmoments.com*, 2020, https://europeanmoments.com/stories/ivan-krastev.

[295] Catherine de Vries, "2021 Dahrendorf Lecture: What do Europeans citizens want the EU to be?", *europeanmoments.com*, 29 Apr 2021, https://youtu.be/u5Ri66IV4dA.

performance, measured by tangible outputs. One day the vaccine roll out will be over, but the EU cannot afford to deliver any less on what young Europeans believe in—climate action, job security, a regime of border management premised on free movement and respect for human rights. The pandemic has accelerated the performance-based competition between European institutions and those of nation-states, including post-Brexit Britain. There is no substitute for competent and timely delivery.

What should the EU be? Investigate and imagine the European project in line with young Europeans' voices. In particular, this chapter has highlighted three domains of interaction on which many young Europeans converge: a society premised on free movement, a social and environmental Europe, and a community of values in a changing world. Young Europeans assume the existence of the EU; our March 2021 poll shows their general support for further integration.[296] But many also see European institutions as starting rather than ending points, and wish to direct them towards larger global goals—whether social, environmental, political or other. The task will be to make progress on these domains of convergence while taking on board the diversity and disagreements among European publics; hence the need for a 'pedagogy' of synergies and trade-offs, towards which this report aims to contribute. Whether this involves further European integration in any given field is something that the EU needs to investigate *together* with young people.

How should the EU speak and listen? Develop more effective habits of communication. Our December 2020 poll highlights the danger in assuming that European citizens understand even the basic organisation of EU institutions.[297] The debate on whether EU institutions suffer from a democratic deficit will continue—not least in relation to their capacity to send a clear message about democracy in member states. What is clear is that, if these institutions are to survive and thrive, they must do better in communicating clearly and persuasively. Just as young Europeans will have to debate the tensions in what they ask of the EU, in order to arrive at moments of synergy, European institutions will have to search for effective ways to convey the coherence and efficacy of their actions, for audiences at home and abroad. Most of all, the success of the EU will depend on improving channels of *listening*, at the supranational, national and local levels. Nor are institutional channels, abstractly conceived, sufficient for such dialogue. As we have learned about the polyphony of Europe's Stories, we have often been surprised by the multiple views and values they contain. Similarly, the EU must cultivate new habits of listening. It should start not with an ideal destination of perfect European unity, but with a clearer understanding of where Europeans actually are with respect to EUrope, and what they would like the EU to do and be.

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296 Garton Ash *et al.*, 25 May 2021.

297 Garton Ash *et al.*, 26 Jan 2021.