

# EUROPE,

## OUR CLIMATE & US

Ideas for the discussion of  
current political issues in class



**Educational resources  
for secondary school  
students**

# Introduction for educators

## Dear Educators,

Europe and climate change are two of the political issues that are currently of major concern to our society and to young people in particular. Whether its Brexit, the EU's copyright reform or the Fridays for Future demonstrations, more and more young people in Europe are entering the public debate, calling attention to the fact that their concerns and ideas are not being heard by those in politically responsible positions. European elections are important in setting the course for the future. How forceful and how credible is Europe's commitment to mitigating climate change and promoting climate justice? To what extent will parties and parliamentary groups reject human and child rights, fundamental European values and the fight against climate change? How is Europe shaping the digital world? How will the process of European integration develop in the future?

Young people who do not yet have the right to vote will be the ones most affected by these decisions and their consequences. These young citizens take for granted and have never called into question achievements such as the universal recognition of human and democratic rights, a unified and peaceful Europe and freedom of movement within the EU. If this generation continues to experience a political climate in which decisions are made without their participation and without their interests being considered, we will have to look at how this will impact their understanding of politics and the way in which they perceive political representation.

Studies show that in the past several years, the interest of young people in politics has been growing, as has their willingness to become involved and take responsibility (see, for example, Greenpeace sustainability barometer, Shell study). The #FridaysForFuture demonstrations are a first expression of this renewed and increasing politicisation of young people, and show that they too are capable of voicing their opinions in public. The prerequisite for the political involvement of secondary school students is that they understand political processes, are able to form their own opinions and that they learn to talk about and discuss political issues that reach into the future.

Think, take action and get involved: With our "... and Us!" series of teaching resources, we would like to provide you with ideas on how you can prompt your students to start thinking about politically relevant issues that shape our society and initiate exciting discussions in the classroom. In addition, these materials contain numerous suggestions on how students can take action and work for a future worth living. The goal is to give young students the opportunity to learn that they are part of our democracy—a democracy in which they can form their own opinions and make themselves heard. We hope that these educational materials will provide you with ideas on how to address current issues in the classroom. We welcome your thoughts and look forward to your feedback!

## Your Greenpeace Education Team

### Why is the European election important?

Elections across the EU for members of the European Parliament define which parties hold power and are therefore definitive for the Parliament's positions for the next five years. The largest party the European Parliament is also expected to select the candidate for president of the European Commission - who is largely responsible for shaping the political agenda and the priorities of the EU during their five-year term - and the Parliament has to approve the other European Commissioners.

This will not only have a determining effect on climate action and other environmental issues, it will also be decisive in terms of how proactive the EU will be on reigning in national governments that flout European values and rules. For example, the Parliament can pressure the EU to apply sanctions on governments that restrict the rights to protest and free speech, inhibit the freedom of the media and undermine independent judicial systems.

In terms of legislation, the European Parliament plays a significant role in deciding the overall direction of the European Union and it has three main powers:

- Legislative: Passes EU laws, together with the EU's member countries (the Council of the EU)
- Supervisory: it provides democratic scrutiny of all EU institutions
- Budgetary: Negotiates and approves the EU budget together with the EU member countries



# EUROPE



Cross-border cooperation, friendship and most importantly, never again war—the European integration process, the founding of the EU and its subsequent development are based on ambitious and visionary ideas. The European Union and the benefits and advantages it offers have long been considered completely natural by young people in Europe. Travel without border checks, the freedom to live and study in other EU countries, friendship, peace and cooperation among the EU countries: this is all so commonplace for young Europeans that they can't imagine anything else. But the EU has its problems too: for example, that the Parliament and Commission want more progressive action, but national governments are blocking them from doing so. The difficulties in addressing challenges such as digitisation and the increasingly serious effects of climate change also reveal another side of how the European Union functions. Brexit, anti-European sentiment and politicians who are against the EU, allegations of a democratic deficit, and discord among the EU countries as to how European integration should proceed complicate matters further.

## What goals and values do secondary school students associate with Europe?



The European Union and the cooperation between its member countries is based on common core values and goals. Discuss the core values of the European idea with your students.

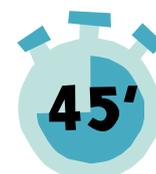
### Suggested activities and discussion openers:

The founding of the EU was based on the common goals and values shared by EU countries.

1. What goals and values do you associate with Europe? Write down everything you can think of!
2. Together, draw a mind map of the terms that reflect the image you have of Europe.
3. Compare your results with the goals and values as defined by the EU:  
[https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/eu-in-brief\\_en](https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/eu-in-brief_en)



## What does Europe mean to young students?



The questions in the questionnaire (the questionnaire is provided on the last page and may be copied) from the “Generation What?” project will help you start your students talking about the various aspects of Europe and make it easy to introduce the subject. The questionnaire does not require students to have any prior knowledge. Start by using it to conduct a brief survey in class!

### Suggested activities and discussion openers:

1. First, answer the following questions on your own.
2. Then gather all the results in the class and evaluate them!
3. What is the breakdown of the answers in your class? Share and discuss the results!



# What do others think about Europe?



In 2016/2017 tens of thousands of people in other European countries also responded to these (and many other) questions in the “Generation What?” project. We have provided a master copy of the original questionnaire on the last page of these materials. An interesting and interactive breakdown of the results of the survey carried out in Europe is available at [www.generation-what.de/portrait/data/europe](http://www.generation-what.de/portrait/data/europe).

With easy-to-use filters, data can be sorted and compared by age group, gender and country. In this way, the results reveal interesting differences and similarities between European countries and inspire discussion on matters of European identity and people’s perceptions of Europe.

## Suggested activities and discussion openers:

1. Compare the results in your class with those of other young people in Germany, other countries and all of Europe who participated in the “Generation What” project.
2. Use the filters to discover the results by age group, gender and country.
3. Then, gather all the results in class and find out what the similarities and differences are.
4. Discuss your findings and develop ideas about the reasons for these differences!

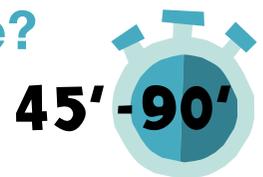


## What do other students really think?

Political questions, especially at the EU level, often seem very distant and it doesn’t even occur to secondary school students that they too can develop and formulate their own ideas of what they want Europe to be like. Rarely does anyone ask them what they think. Encourage your students to develop, formulate and discuss their own ideas on the future of Europe!



# What should the future of Europe look like?



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## Suggested activities and discussion openers:

1. What should Europe be like? What do you want for the future of the EU? In groups of three, brainstorm ideas and thoughts—there is no right or wrong, every idea counts.
2. Collect at least two advantages and disadvantages and select two ideas that you would like to present to the class.
3. One after another, each group presents the ideas selected to the class. When it is your turn, explain why your group thinks its ideas make sense.



# EUROPA, OUR CLIMATE AND US — #VOTEFORCLIMATE



Most secondary school students in Germany will not be old enough to vote in the European elections. The Fridays for Future movement shows how young people can also succeed in making their concerns and demands heard — be it regarding the future of Europe, climate policy or other political and social issues.

## Suggested activities and discussion openers:

Together, brainstorm ideas and strategies on how you can influence the future of Europe and climate protection policy — especially in view of the upcoming European elections in which people under the age of 18 aren't allowed to vote yet! Here are some suggestions:

### Ask your head of government what has been done to promote climate action

The people with the most power to make the EU a real climate leader are the national heads of government. They are currently negotiating the EU's long-term climate strategy and are responsible for setting emission reductions targets. Young people can hold heads of government accountable for their actions by sharing their concerns, ask them questions, confronting them with their records and tell them about their ideas for the future. Members of the European Parliament are trying to get a say on the EU's long-term climate strategy. It can be worthwhile getting in touch with them too.

### Talk to politicians

Many debates and election campaigns events are held everywhere before European elections; political parties set up stands in pedestrian zones and candidates take interest in communicating with local citizens. Motivate your students to take advantage of this opportunity and talk to candidates about their ideas for a future worth living! Students can also organise group discussions at school and invite the candidates and representatives—this also works for state and local elections and even when there are no upcoming elections.

### Talk to people and motivate them to vote

High voter turnout is important for the legitimacy of democratic elections. Despite the fact that most secondary school students are not yet permitted to vote, they can take action by encouraging eligible voters around them to exercise their right to vote. In conversations with these potential voters, students can express their ideas about Europe and the future. Maybe they can succeed in convincing them to vote and in doing so also motivate them to take the interests and future of young people into consideration.

### Public consultations, petitions and demonstrations

Making your position heard is important for a functioning democracy. Citizens can express their views on political issues in consultations—the EU conducts many public consultations online, recently for example, on seasonal clock changes. Many online platforms bundle petitions, where young people can also support already existing issues and even launch their own petitions. Demonstrations are a timeless means of expressing one's own opinion publicly.

### Join online discussions on social media and other platforms

On social media channels, in the comments section of news websites and in forums: politics are discussed everywhere online, but often not in a very constructive way. Privacy and security, the culture of debate and hate speech, manipulation, fake news and opinion bubbles pose huge challenges. On the other hand, social media offer unprecedented opportunities to be publicly and politically effective. But unfortunately, this also carries the danger of targeted manipulation, as discussed in the context of the Brexit debate and of the US 2016 presidential elections. Fake news and fear mongering by means of targeted disinformation have become big problems in the run-up to elections. It is therefore particularly important to always question news and links shared via social media. A very easy fact checking method is to do your own research by doing a web search. Has the issue been mentioned on public broadcasting channels? Have major daily newspapers reported on the issue at hand? Are there many mentions of the subject or is there only a single article posted on private blogs and platforms that offer no information on the publisher?

# EUROPE AND THE CLIMATE



Many of the causes and consequences of climate change affect individual countries, but also pose challenges that transcend national borders. It is the EU, not its member states, that negotiates climate measures on a global level. The EU is therefore a force to be reckoned with and can stand up to big nations such as China, the US and India. At the same time, the EU can only defend positions that its members agree with. EU emissions have dropped by more than 22% between 1990 and 2016. It worked because the EU set a 2020 target for the EU as a whole, as well as each member country. Unfortunately, that doesn't mean we're on the right track to achieve the Paris agreement. According to the UN, current pledges by governments around the world put the world on track to about 3 degrees of warming, by 2100. Preliminary data of the EU's greenhouse gas emissions shows that they increased in 2017 whereas emissions need to rapidly fall.

Over 80% of the environmental protection laws in place in Germany today have their roots in EU regulations. But progress in mitigating climate change is still far too tentative. With the Fridays for Future demonstrations, tens of thousands of school students have triggered a public debate on climate change, demanding a more determined approach. European elections are important in setting the course for the future climate policy. Take this opportunity to discuss climate change and to examine the EU's role in the fight against it. Here you will find information on EU climate policy: [https://ec.europa.eu/clima/index\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/clima/index_en)

## Understanding our climate

Questions relating to climate protection, international climate policy and climate justice are examined more closely in the following educational resource materials provided by Greenpeace Germany:



- Teaching materials "A Matter of Negotiation?"
- Teaching materials "Schools for Earth"
- Digital and interactive web app: "Konsumspuren" (Consumer Footprints)
- Teaching materials "Wälder" (Forests) – (action worksheet 5: Forests and Climate)
- Teaching materials "Mobilität: Verkehr[t]" (Mobility) – (especially action worksheet 2)

You can download, use or order these educational resource materials free of charge at [www.greenpeace.de/bildungsmaterialien](http://www.greenpeace.de/bildungsmaterialien)

## What impact does the EU have on environmental and climate policy?



The many areas of policy and decision-making processes at the European level, don't always make it easy to fully understand the importance of the EU's influence on climate policy. Together with your students, think about how and why the EU plays an important role in protecting our environment and our climate. Start by gathering examples of EU directives and regulations that contribute to mitigating climate change and protecting the environment. Give your students pointers and supplement their examples, for instance, with the directives and regulations listed below. Start a discussion in class using the examples collected. Discuss what the class thinks about these regulations and whether it makes sense to address these issues at the EU level.

### Suggested activities and discussion openers:

1. What EU regulations relating to climate change have you heard of? Can you think of examples of legislation that have been discussed and/or adopted recently? Together, make a list of examples!
2. For each example, ask yourselves the following question: Do you think the EU's legislation makes sense? Why or why not?





- The EU-wide ban on single-use plastic products like disposable plastic straws and plates, where no alternative exists, is intended to reduce the use of plastic in the EU starting in 2021.
- CO2 vehicle emission standards are intended to lower new car CO2 emissions by 37.5% by 2030 compared to 2021 levels.
- The REACH regulation adopted by the EU regulates the registration, evaluation, authorisation and restriction of potentially hazardous chemicals.
- The EU Water Framework Directive aims to systematically improve the status of all European surface water (lakes, rivers, transitional and coastal water, and groundwater).
- Sector-specific directives, such as the Nitrates Directive for the agricultural industry, clearly define the measures necessary in a particular sector or industry.
- The Habitats Directive aims to protect wild fauna and flora species, their natural habitats and form a network of protected sites across Europe. To achieve this, protected sites and areas are designated by each member state in accordance with EU requirements.

## Opinions on the EU's climate policy



The complexities of the issues, the numerous economic and aspects of life it affects as well as the conflicting interests of the various societal and political groups make EU climate policy slow and difficult. But what do these different groups' think about the EU's climate policy?

Encourage your students to examine different perspectives on EU climate policy and identify the views held by a variety of interest groups. Groups could include:

- Environmental organisations
- Trade and industry associations
- Unions, workers' associations
- Young people who actively take part in Fridays for Future demonstrations
- Climate researchers

You can then present the findings to the class and start a discussion – or use them as the basis for role play.

### Suggested activities and discussion openers:



1. Different interest groups have very different opinions on EU climate policy. But what does each group actually think?
2. What are the different opinions on the EU's climate policy? Working in small groups, choose an interest group and find out where this particular group stands in regard to climate policy!
3. Present your findings to the rest of the class and discuss what possible reasons the interest groups could have for advocating these particular positions. What are their motives?
4. Role play: assign roles in class and discuss the question of whether the EU's future climate policy should be tougher or not.

# The political parties' election platforms and climate change



The outcome of the European elections will determine the direction of European policy for the next five years. Many decisions concerning climate policy in particular are expected to be taken during the upcoming legislative period. The parties competing in the European elections advocate very different solutions for dealing with this challenge. Together with your students, explore their voting records, positions and find out what the different views are! Depending on the students' level of knowledge, these suggestions can be used to examine the parties up for election in Germany, as well as the political groups in the EU Parliament.

## Suggested activities and discussion openers:

In the election to the EU Parliament, each party presents a platform in which it lays out its priorities for the further development of the EU and what it wishes to implement in specific areas of policy. What exactly do their positions mean for our climate?



1. Build groups and analyse what the individual parties have to say about climate change and what steps they propose or promise to undertake. Summarise each of the parties' demands and ideas on a poster.
2. Each group uses its poster to present the position of the party they chose to the rest of the class. Looking at each party, the class discusses what it would mean for our climate if that particular party won the European election.

## Europe and me

### For me Europe is ...

- the only project for the future
- a historical illusion
- a necessary construction
- a system of domination
- nothing more than the name of a continent

### Do you feel European?

- Yes
- No

### I feel I am most part of ...

- my city/my region
- my country
- Europe
- the world

### In your opinion, which of the following is connected to the European Union?

- the euro
- freedom of movement to work, travel and study in any EU country
- peace
- bureaucracy
- economic growth
- cultural diversity
- shared values
- democracy
- more co-determination in the world
- lack of control at the borders of Europe
- waste of money
- social security
- loss of cultural identity
- more crime
- unemployment
- none of these

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