

## Our demands on the German EU Council Presidency 2020

Germany assumes the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union from 1 July 2020. The Federal Government has set political priorities with a programme for its six-month Presidency.<sup>1</sup> In order to be able to set longer-term priorities, three presidencies always form a trio. Germany is working with Slovenia and Portugal in the trio presidency. A programme was also adopted for this trio presidency which sets political priorities for a year and a half.<sup>2</sup>

Expectations were already high before the pandemic, and major challenges lie ahead in the second half of 2020, such as the negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), the "Next Generation EU" reconstruction instrument<sup>3</sup> and the Brexit.

However, the corona pandemic and the crisis that is already foreseeable are also a good starting point for becoming more capable of action and ultimately emerging from the situation stronger together. We expect Germany to play an active, shaping role in the spirit of the "new start for Europe" described in the coalition agreement. Even if the possibilities for a Council Presidency are limited, the pandemic has shown, that a fundamental reform of the EU is necessary. European challenges need European solutions: This is the goal of the DBJR. We have therefore set six political priorities for the Presidency. We demand that the German Council Presidency take the following points forward in concrete terms:

- A strong Youth Work Agenda that promotes youth work in Europe
- A democratic Europe that puts fundamental rights at its heart
- A Europe where young people can exchange ideas without obstacles
- A European social policy that makes up for the imbalances
- A European climate and sustainability policy to overcome the climate crisis
- A European asylum and migration policy based on European values

A swift agreement on the MFF negotiations and an increase in the EU budget are central to all these issues. We welcome the fact that the Federal Government will work to increase and further develop the EU budget. We expect it to increase Germany's contribution in accordance with the coalition agreement and thus also to take on a leading role within the Member States. Especially in times when the EU needs to be strengthened again due to closed borders and a lack of solidarity, the Erasmus+ programme needs to be at least tripled.

### **A strong Youth Work Agenda that promotes youth work in Europe**

It has been announced for the Council Presidency that youth work is to be strengthened with a "Youth Work Agenda". The DBJR adopted a separate statement on this topic in May 2020.<sup>4</sup> The agenda is intended to strengthen the coordination of the Member States in order to create the framework conditions for good "Youth Work" throughout Europe and to facilitate youth exchanges.

1 <https://www.eu2020.de/blob/2360246/d08098eae179a722d91d99f529d5517/pdf-programm-de-data.pdf>

2 <https://www.eu2020.de/blob/2354328/2c2c22db16d6bc2b6336867455b56bbb/pdf-trioprogramme-de-data.pdf>

3 As part of the new MFF, a "next generation EU" recovery instrument has been proposed to tackle the recession triggered by the pandemic. The instrument would consist of loans and, for the first time, grants, and the EU could then take on debt together. Further information is available here: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/health/coronavirus-response/recovery-plan-europe\\_de](https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/health/coronavirus-response/recovery-plan-europe_de)

4 <https://www.dbjr.de/fileadmin/Stellungnahmen/2020/DBJR-Stellungnahme-youthwork-2020.pdf>

Specifically, we expect the Federal Government to commit itself to the following four points:

- Legal recognition and structural support: strengthening the role of youth organisations and councils
- Meaningful participation of young people at all levels
- Implementation of the EU youth goals in the Member States
- Quality assurance in child and youth work

Not least because of the Corona pandemic, the Youth Work Agenda must focus on securing and expanding the work of youth organisations and councils in Europe, both from a political and financial perspective. The role of youth organisations as platforms for democracy and as inclusive and locally based multipliers is central to Youth Work. Structures that have grown up locally as well as democratically organised youth organisations should be supported structurally and financially. This requires a legal framework in all Member States which ensures both legal recognition and financial support for the relevant structures in the long term.

The special situation in different countries must be taken into account. In addition, the DBJR is critical of the focus on validation, for example in the case of the Youth Pass, because this kind of recognition reduces voluntary work to educational outcomes. Youth (organisation) work is more than just education: it requires freedom of action and therefore cannot be validated.

Effective participation and empowerment of young people in all matters affecting them should be another central part of the Youth Work Agenda. Involving young people strengthens democratic societies and European identity in a sustainable way. The Youth Work Agenda should use the example of co-management in the Council of Europe to develop instruments for the meaningful participation of young people at EU level, in order to enable joint responsibility for the content and funding of youth policy. Another good example of participation are the EU Youth Goals, for whose implementation the Youth Work Agenda must provide a framework.

### **A democratic Europe that puts fundamental rights at the heart**

The adoption of "Conclusions on Democracy and Youth in Europe" was announced by the Youth Ministers' Council. With the conference on the future of the EU, the Federal Government wants to conduct a dialogue with the citizens. In addition, it wants to work towards strengthening fundamental values and the rule of law within the EU.

These are all central themes for youth organisations and councils. We would have liked to see more ambition and concrete projects from the Federal Government, particularly with a view to strengthening European democracy and structural co-management of young people. We expect the Federal Government to commit itself to the following three points:

- Taking participation seriously: including integrating the results of the EU Youth Conference in the conclusions
- Conference on the future of the EU: a binding and open-ended process is needed as well as the structural involvement of organised civil society
- Rule of law mechanism for the allocation of funds without harming civil society

We expect that structural participation of young people is taken seriously as a central part of democracy and that concrete proposals for young people's participation in European politics are included in the conclusions on democracy and youth. The results of the EU Youth Conference, which is being held in Berlin under the presidency of the Council, for example, must be included.

For the conference on the future of the EU, we would have liked to see more ambition in the presidency programme. The conference offers a good opportunity to ambitiously push forward long overdue reforms - such as strengthening the European Parliament. In inter-institutional negotiations, treaty changes must not be taboo. It is also essential that organised civil society is involved. This is

the only way to ensure sustainable participation. This would also take into account the Federal Government's announcement that it intends to promote an active civil society.

The EU must guarantee democracy and the rule of law in Europe. In the DBJR position of 2018, we called for a system of incentives for the rule of law within the EU funding programmes.<sup>5</sup> We therefore welcome the fact that the Federal Government wishes to strengthen fundamental values within the EU and supports the Commission proposal to link EU budget funds to compliance with rule of law standards. It must be ensured, however, that funds for civil society structures are not cut. Because they are particularly needed in this situation, consideration could be given to allocating the funds centrally at European level.

### **A Europe in which young people volunteer and share their experiences**

A reform of the 2008 Recommendation on the mobility of young volunteers was also announced for the Council Presidency. This has become necessary because the Solidarity Corps has replaced the European Voluntary Service. The reform proposal comes from the Commission, after which the recommendation is to be discussed in the Council of Youth Ministers. In addition, negotiations on the design of the individual programmes and their funding amounts are currently taking place at the same time as the MFF negotiations. We expect the Federal Government to press ahead with the following points:

- Voluntary services are learning services and must not be instrumentalised.
- Voluntary services are labour market neutral.
- Increasing the funds for the youth programmes in the framework of the MFF negotiations

We regret that with the European Voluntary Service a functioning programme has come to an end. The reform, in which civil society was not involved, also means a paradigm shift from volunteering to solidarity. This solidarity is undoubtedly necessary in Europe, but whether young people should compensate for this with a "community service" remains questionable. The other planned components of humanitarian aid as well as jobs and internships can lead to an instrumentalisation of the volunteering programme. The learning components and the corresponding pedagogical support must not be neglected in a voluntary service. It is precisely in this respect that civil society organisations play a central role, which is currently being neglected. The Solidarity Corps must also retain its age limit and remain a youth programme.

The pandemic has further increased the challenges facing young volunteers. Many young people have had to stop their voluntary service, which has led to considerable costs. But even without a crisis, there are obstacles in Europe that make volunteering difficult - these must be removed.

Youth exchanges and voluntary services are central to strengthening cohesion and European integration. We therefore expect the Federal Government to advocate an increase in funding for the Erasmus+ youth programmes and the Solidarity Corps within the framework of the MFF negotiations. In particular, if the new "DiscoverEU" is added, this will lead in the worst case scenario to a cutback for the youth exchange and voluntary service sector.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.dbjr.de/fileadmin/Positionen/2018/2018-DBJR-VV-POSITION-v1-europa.pdf>

## A European social policy that compensates for imbalances

The pandemic has worsened the social situation of many (young) people. Even before that, 26.3 percent of young people were at risk of poverty or social exclusion.<sup>6</sup> The crisis can only be overcome if solidarity between people and Member States becomes an EU priority. The German Presidency has announced its intention to promote upward social convergence and to develop frameworks for national minimum wages and for national minimum income systems. The Federal Government wants to combat youth unemployment and to provide funding accordingly in the European Social Fund+ (ESF+). The Commission proposed strengthening the Youth Guarantee, which will be negotiated in the second half of 2020. In addition, the Federal Government puts a focus on vocational training.

We welcome these plans and expect them to result in binding guidelines for a social Europe. The European pillar of social rights must be implemented with binding legislation. In addition, the funds for social and youth employment policy must be expanded in the context of the MFF negotiations in order to meet growing European challenges. We expect concrete progress to be made to improve the social situation of young people in Europe:

- Adequate financing of ESF+ and European earmarking of ESF+ funds for child and youth guarantee in the context of MFF negotiations<sup>7</sup>
- Mandate in the Council to strengthen the Youth Guarantee
- A Europe-wide right to vocational training

In the new MFF proposal, ESF+ funding has been reduced compared to May 2018. The funds earmarked for youth employment has also been reduced compared to the current funding period. Not least in view of the new crisis, the ESF+ must be well equipped to combat youth unemployment, among other things. We support Parliament's position that the earmarking per Member State for both social inclusion and youth employment must be increased. In addition, the EUR 6 billion currently earmarked for youth employment must also be earmarked for the next period.

Young people are more often precariously employed. And they are also often the first to become unemployed in crises. In 2019, 27 percent of 15 to 29-year-olds were involuntarily employed part-time.<sup>8</sup> That is why the Youth Guarantee<sup>9</sup> urgently needs to be strengthened: Minimum standards are needed for the quality of the offers under the Youth Guarantee. A quality feature of the Youth Guarantee is a long-term employment prospect, which is often achieved by vocational training. In order to implement a Europe-wide right to good vocational training, common rules are needed to protect young people from increasing precarity. The Council Presidency must press ahead with these points in the Education Council.

## A climate and sustainability policy that overcomes the climate crisis

To stop climate change, nothing less than a system change is needed.<sup>10</sup> The Green Deal, which was presented at the end of 2019, aims to make Europe climate-neutral by 2050. It comprises a package of around 50 measures. With a climate law, the Commission wants to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 50 to 55 percent by 2030 compared to 1990. The Just Transition Fund is intended to help countries that are particularly affected to convert to an emission-free economy. The initiatives are accompanied by a climate pact, which aims to communicate climate policy better.

The Federal Government is called upon to set the right course: Many of the initiatives must take decisive steps as soon as possible. Germany has announced that it will accompany the implementation of the Green Deal and conclude the negotiations on the climate law by the end of the year. The Fed-

<sup>6</sup> 2018: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Young\\_people\\_-\\_social\\_inclusion](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Young_people_-_social_inclusion)

<sup>7</sup> ESF+ funds are allocated to Member States for a specific purpose. In the case of earmarking, there is often a lengthy discussion about the percentages of the respective purposes that are given in funding pots.

<sup>8</sup> Eurostat: [https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=yth\\_empl\\_080&lang=de](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=yth_empl_080&lang=de)

<sup>9</sup> In 2013, a Recommendation to Member States was adopted which guarantees young people a job, further education or training after six months of completion of education or training. Further information can be found here: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1079&langId=de>

<sup>10</sup> The DBJR has taken a detailed position on the subject of sustainability in its Policy Position 2018: <https://www.dbjr.de/themen/nachhaltigkeit/>. This also contains further positions on environmentally friendly mobility, environmentally and animal-friendly agriculture, biodiversity and consumption.

eral Government must ensure that the Climate Act and the Climate Pact in particular, as well as the negotiations on the nationally determined contributions under the Paris Climate Agreement, become more ambitious by

- The reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 65 percent by 2030
- Socio-ecological transformation of the economy in line with the 2030 Agenda
- Appropriate support for the Just Transition Fund and transition support only with clear de-commissioning criteria for fossil-thermal power plants
- On the Climate Pact an effective participation of young people in climate policy

As a continent, Europe is best placed to tackle the climate crisis. The EU must live up to this pioneering role, particularly in implementing the Paris Climate Agreement. The Green Deal is going in the right direction, but climate neutrality will be needed well before 2050 if the 1.5°C target is to be met. A socio-ecological transformation of all areas of society in the sense of Agenda 2030 is needed, including, within the framework of the reform of the Stability and Growth Pact, giving the Member States more flexibility for investments and abandoning the strict EU budget policy.

We welcome the Just Transition Fund as a means of solidarity within Europe. However, ten billion euros are not enough to jointly bear the costs of transition. Clear closure criteria for nuclear power plants and criteria for the substantial reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are needed for regions that want to benefit from this fund. It must be ensured that the money arrives in the affected regions and is used to create career alternatives for the workers affected.

Young people are strongly involved in the debate on sustainability and climate protection. We welcome the Climate Pact as an instrument for communicating sustainable actions. But talking about it is not enough: Meaningful participation of young people in climate and sustainability policy must be institutionalised within the framework of the Climate Pact.

### **An asylum and migration policy based on European values**

"What happens on Europe's external borders is difficult to put into words." That's what we wrote in our policy position 2018. Unfortunately, the situation has worsened since then. People die every day in the Mediterranean. There are illegal pushbacks, some of them out to sea. Overcrowded camps like Moria are being set up on Greek islands. Europe shuts down its borders. This misguided policy is moving further and further away from human rights and human dignity - the common European values. It must be ended as a matter of urgency.

In order to achieve concrete progress in European asylum and migration policy over the next six months, we expect three things from the German Federal Government:

- Mandate in the Council of the EU on the reform of the European asylum system
- Ensuring sea rescue in the Mediterranean and clearing overcrowded camps such as Moria in Lesbos
- Ensuring freedom of travel for young refugees in the context of youth organisations' activities

We welcome the fact that the Federal Government is ambitious in its intention to reform the European asylum system in order to create a fair, workable, efficient and crisis-proof system. The new system should meet humanitarian standards and prevent individual Member States from being overburdened. Unfortunately, the government also wants to expand Frontex to introduce binding procedures at the EU's external borders. We strongly oppose this plan. The EU needs an European asylum system that shows solidarity with refugees and is based on European values.

The reform must ensure that the European freedom to travel in youth organisations also applies to young refugees. Young people with short-term residency permits as well as young people undergoing asylum proceedings are often not allowed to take part in non-formal education outside Germany. In the case of school trips, there is a legal entitlement to participation for refugee pupils,

which is guaranteed by the so-called "Schüler\*innensammelliste" (list of pupils). An analogous claim to non-formal education trips must be made possible.

The EU must also fully comply with its obligations under international law and the rule of law towards those seeking protection. The criminalisation of civilian rescuers at sea must be ended immediately. A European immigration policy must be created with a European asylum authority with a fair distribution based on solidarity and fairness. This is our humanitarian duty - the reception of refugees requires no financial compensation.

With these six priorities, we as youth organisations and councils would like to shape the German Presidency of the Council. We expect the Federal Government to live up to its active role. In the current state of the EU these six priorities are central: that the EU can regain room for manoeuvre, that Member States work together in solidarity and justice and that the young generation can live in a better Europe.

*Unanimously decided in the DBJR executive committee on 7.07.2020 in Berlin.*