

A stylized graphic of the Earth, showing continents in green and oceans in blue, positioned on the left side of the cover.

Liberal Solutions

for a Sustainable Europe

EUROPEAN LIBERAL YOUTH
LYMEI

elf



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Introduction

Following the successful publication of the **Liberal Hack 2022 - Liberal Solutions for a Digital Europe** - the **European Liberal Forum (ELF)**, with the support of **LYMEC (European Liberal Youth)** and our Cypriot partner **NEODEPA**, organized the Liberal Hack Youth Event 2023, which was on the topics of environment, sustainability, and climate change. A hackathon is a timed event (usually between 24 and 48 hours), in which teams made up of technical and business experts come together to collaborate intensively on creative projects.

Because our organisation is made up of politically engaged young people, at the **ELF's Liberal Hack Youth Event 2023**, held in Ayia Napa, Cyprus, in June 16–18, 2023, the aim was to come up with concrete liberal policies that would benefit the European Union as a whole.

The **Liberal Hack Youth Event 2023** was intended to challenge our young liberal participants to explore means of making Europe energetically independent and the world's first climate-neutral continent. The participants acquired a more detailed understanding of the **European Green Deal goals**. The hackathon, featuring teams of young liberals from all over Europe, discussed proposals for a greener and more sustainable Europe. They focused on one specific problem to find an actionable solution for it, potentially contributing to making significant changes.

The participants worked on proposals on the following subtopics: **Renewable and Nuclear Energy, Sustainable Transportation, Circular economy, and Tackling Deforestation**.



The overall goal was to challenge the participants of the hackathon to take an active part as young liberals in shaping the future of Europe's environmental, energy, and climate change policies, topics that are of special relevance and interest to the young generation and to liberal stakeholders in Europe.

The programme was intended to achieve an optimal balance between having enough hacking time (time that the teams have to work together) and enough content sessions with valuable experts on the matter. After that, the young liberals who took part in the event were finally ready to present their policy-oriented solutions to the jury, consisting of **Michalis Ioannou**, President of NEODEPA; **Even Diot**, ELF Project Officer; **Eugenia Herodotou**, Co-Owner of EnergyIntel Services; and **George Lakkotrypis**, Non-Executive Director at ElvalHalcor S.A. and Cypriot ex-Minister of Energy, Commerce, Industry and Tourism. Each team gave their best in presenting their ideas, and consequently, the scores they received were extremely close.

The winners were the participants of the Circular Economy hacking team, who presented innovative solutions to the question of developing a circular economy in a rural area. All of the groups successfully followed the guidelines and correctly accomplished the aim of the hackathon by designing actionable, coherent, and innovative liberal policies to tackle the challenge that was assigned to them.

In the following pages, you will find comprehensive descriptions of the projects that the four groups worked on and the policy proposals that they produced.

What's the aim of this Booklet?

The European Union has set the goal of being **climate-neutral and energy independent**. This is a long process, and youth involvement is the key because young liberals have many ideas for a greener and more sustainable future for Europe. For this reason, we hope to take a more active part in shaping Europe's future in environment and energy, a topic that is of crucial importance for us and for future generations. Here, the overall goal is to contribute to making Europe the first climate-neutral continent and making the EU energy independent from other countries.

The conclusions of this booklet have been distributed and promoted among our networks to have an impact on the broader audience of LYMEC to create an improved general understanding of the topic. This booklet provides **policy proposals developed before, during, and after the event, their potential effects on the fields that they are oriented toward, and tips and advice for better preparation for the future.**

Circular Economy

Group members

Teodora Dimitrovska (Liberal Democratic Youth, North Macedonia)

Diana Sheptukha (ZeMolodizhka, Ukraine)

Anna Kyprianou (NEODEPA, Cyprus)

Alicja Jakimko (Nowoczesna Youth, Poland)

Background

This proposal focuses on developing a circular economy in rural areas. Here, the goal is to incorporate new technologies to advance the creation of spaces in which people could be self-sufficient. According to this proposal, the EU would create a fund devoted to innovative projects that would advance the process of making rural and less developed areas more sustainable. An additional goal is to renovate villages with existing materials.

Scope

The scope of the project is to make living in villages more attractive, bringing people together in rural areas. Cities are developing much more rapidly due to investments being made, especially in the technological arena, therefore there is a corresponding need to improve local economies in rural areas and use new, sustainable technologies that could make investments worth it. This project could also create new job opportunities, in particular for people who do not like the idea of corporate routines. This proposal focuses on entrepreneurs with innovative ideas as they move on to well-functioning businesses.

Stakeholder Engagement

The stakeholders of interest for this proposal are as follows:

- Young entrepreneurs, who are working on and pitching projects to obtain the funding;
- EU member states, which are working on a framework to develop smart villages in the EU;
- EU candidate States, which need to implement circular solutions in their economies through a negotiation framework, preferably in the rural areas first, to join the EU;
- Investors who are working closely with decision-makers to specify their needs;
- Local communities, which are the direct target of the policy.

Main Provisions

The proposal sets **EU funding for entrepreneurial projects or start-ups** that could help implement a circular economy in local communities. Creating this would entail research on stakeholders' needs in the format of open discussions. It also puts forward the **IT Nomad framework**: physical and remote jobs in smart villages, with a strict regulatory framework for recycling and reusable energy systems to create an eco-friendly environment.

Possible additional provisions would involve **lowering taxes for companies who use recycling or other innovative methods** to transform existing machines to advance an **eco-friendly economy**, as well as creating awareness campaigns for schools to educate on circular economy and its implementation in rural areas. An additional provision of this policy proposal considers the integration of circular economy practices as a condition of accession to join the EU.

Implementation Roadmap

Before this proposal can be implemented, it is necessary for a group of experts to draft the policy in a formal and official way. After this, the proposal would be then forwarded to the ALDE Party and the Renew Europe Group **to be presented in the European Parliament**. Third, a meeting would be held with European lobbying groups to discuss the policy. Finally, young activists, entrepreneurs, and youth NGOs would be invited to the EU Parliament to voice their opinions on this matter.

Impact

As liberals, we believe that entrepreneurs have the power to implement their innovative ideas, and recognise the value of competitiveness in the market. The objective of this policy proposal is to **support entrepreneurs' actions and provide them with room to grow**. We believe that great changes begin in small ways or at the local level. **Youth is our future!** By giving them the support and tools they need, we can help create a sustainable future.





Tackling Deforestation through Innovation

Group members

Felix Barenthien (Julis, Germany)

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Frederika Klčová (IPPS, Czechia)

Background

Deforestation is a major environmental concern. **Ongoing deforestation damages valuable ecosystems, reduces biodiversity, and negatively affects climate change.** Deforestation has many different causes worldwide, the largest drivers of which are the expansion of **cattle farming** and of **agriculture for crops** like soy and palm oil harvesting. Currently, the largest at-risk forest is the **Amazon rainforest**, which has the largest loss forested area in the world each year.

Scope

This policy focuses on **preventing additional deforestation of the Amazon rainforest in Brazil.** The main drivers behind deforestation in Brazil relate to **beef exports**, as forests are chopped down for cattle, while parts of the rainforest are also slashed and burned to create **fertile soil for soy plantations**, the product of which is used to feed the cattle. This policy focuses on how the EU can change its domestic and foreign policy to restrict further deforestation. This can be accomplished through three key means: improving the sustainability of cattle farming, reducing meat (beef) consumption, and improving competition within agriculture to encourage beef production to move toward Europe and away from the rainforest.

Stakeholder Engagement

The EU Parliament must minimise environmental harm within the European Union, fight climate change, and promote the democratic values and the economic wellbeing of the EU. Moreover, **cattle farmers in Brazil are reaping profits and have cheap production costs, while European farmers are struggling to find profits, cheaper means of production, and reliable governance.** The goals of knowledge institutions are the sustainability and accessibility of knowledge to promote the collective good. On the one hand, consumers are looking to find lower prices, higher-quality food, and better quality of living. On the other hand, corporations are seeking profits, opportunities for innovation (to obtain a competitive edge), and shareholder value.

Main Provisions

Among the main provisions of this proposal, **EU states must collaborate on drafting a UN resolution that would designate zero-deforestation areas** and establish a committee for monitoring and enforcement. **The EU should invest in research and cooperation** between knowledge institutions in the EU and Brazil. In the short term, this should concentrate on **facilitating innovative solutions that are tailored to the unique environment of the Amazon rainforests and can be viable for the Brazilian market.** Long-term goals should include moving toward sustainable meat alternatives, potentially including lab-grown meat as a sustainable substitute.

A certification should be introduced for meat products that would certify that meat was produced without deforestation. Finally, financial incentives should be provided, and European farmers who adopt sustainable production methods should be supported. Farmers should be incentivized to produce livestock in environmentally responsible ways while protecting forests and biodiversity.

Implementation Roadmap

Implementation Steps: Policy to Address Deforestation from Livestock Production

Advocacy and Collaboration:

- Establish a working group of EU member states;
- Advocate for a UN resolution on zero-deforestation areas;
- Form a committee to observe and enforce the rules.

Research and Innovation:

- Invest in EU-Brazil research cooperation;
- Identify on short-term solutions for sustainable livestock production in the Amazon;
- Support long-term research to develop sustainable meat alternatives.

Certification and Supply Chain Measures:

- Introduce a certification scheme for deforestation-free meat products;
- Develop a transparent verification processes;
- Ensure that the supply chain is traceable.

Financial Incentives and Support:

- Provide financial incentives to European farmers to promote the adoption of sustainable practices;
- Offer grants, subsidies, and loans to facilitate the transition;
- Provide training and knowledge-sharing programs.



Monitoring and Evaluation:

- Establish monitoring systems to record progress and compliance;
- Regularly evaluate the policy's effectiveness;
- Make necessary adjustments based on evaluations.

Stakeholder Engagement and International Cooperation:

- Engage with farmers, associations, organizations, and consumers;
- Collaborate with the Brazil government and other international partners;
- Share knowledge and best practices;
- Through implementing these steps, EU member states can address deforestation in the context of livestock production, promote sustainability, and protect forests and biodiversity.

Impact

The main impact of this policy will be to **reduce drivers of deforestation by shifting some meat production back to Europe and encouraging innovative and sustainable cattle farming.** By means of this measure, the current deforestation of the Amazon can be slowed down and potentially stopped entirely. If this is done, biodiversity will be maintained, and this initiative also directly supports the mitigation of climate change. **In the long term, this could enable the Amazon ecosystem to recover.** Thus, climate change directly affects quality of life across the globe, and following our guidelines will force the governments to develop for a more sustainable and pro-liberal society over the longterm. Further investigation of forest ecosystems to be carried out in the field condition is highly recommended.

This policy emphasizes the **liberal value of responsibility** by limiting the expression of freedom that causes more collective harm than individual benefit while rewarding those who innovate to improve general wellbeing.

Renewable and Nuclear Energy

Group members

Hans Fredrik Jacobsen (Unge Venstre, Norway)

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Anna Trushkina (European Youth of Ukraine, Ukraine)

Christos Bentsos (LYMEC IMS, Greece)

Background

The **recent changes in the energy sector** beginning with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic are structural, including high oil prices, EU legislation requiring more emissions reduction, the movement of the auto industry toward electromobility, the rapid growth of the exploitation of renewable sources, and the continuously fluctuating demand for energy.

Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the energy sector has become a cornerstone in the world economy, mainly due to rising energy costs, which, in addition to pushing rising inflation up, have caused social upheaval in many countries.

At the European level, concerns regarding the dependency on fuel imports have increased, in spite of the growth of the share of electricity obtained from **renewable energy sources (RESs)**, as conventional back-up capacities are needed to secure supply.

Europe's dependency on fuel prices can not only be reduced by increasing the share of domestic RESs, but also by increasing interconnection and electricity market coupling.

Scope

This proposal addresses a **crucial aspect of the transition to RESs to mitigate the challenges posed by climate change and ensure a sustainable future.** The transition to RESs is essential for combating the adverse effects of climate change. Significantly reducing greenhouse gas emissions, renewable energy can help mitigate global warming, reduce air pollution, and promote a cleaner and healthier environment. This proposal addresses this pressing issue with a **focus on nuclear power, hydrogen as a source of energy, and carbon capture,** all of which have the potential to make a significant impact in the fight against climate change. **Achieving a diversified and sustainable energy mix is crucial for energy security and resilience.** Through expanding the use of RESs, societies can decrease their dependence on fossil fuels and increase the reliability and stability of their energy systems. Moreover, investment in renewable energy technologies can provide substantial opportunities for economic growth and job creation.

Stakeholder Engagement

We recognize that certain stakeholders have a greater impact on:

- Creating the relevant policies and easing the legal side of the innovation process: policy-makers;
- Engaging in research and providing new technologies for renewable energy solutions: businesses;
- Investing in research for innovative renewable energy solutions: investors;
- Responding to the effects to their energy costs and the availability of energy: consumers;
- Perform research at universities and through the job market, as well as gaining hands-on experience;
- Bring the notion of prosumers to life, where the producer and the consumer of energy are the same: the public.

Implementation Roadmap

We split up the implementation and take it in different directions to achieve our long-term goal.

Short-term policies (2030)

- Simplifying and expediting the **permitting processes for renewable energy projects** to reduce delays and bureaucratic obstacles. Enhancing the concept of one stop-shops.
- Encouraging member states to **use the nuclear power plants** that have already been built and invest in building more.
- Making it less beneficial for countries to begin to use coal and fossil fuel and to **actively seek other energy solutions** and start adopting them as quickly as possible.
- Developing a **toolbox with emergency measures** to be put into action in extreme situations, such as the recent energy crisis. For example, this could include market-based measures like price caps, to subsidize the retail electricity market.
- Increasing **LNG infrastructure** at European ports to be able to receive more LNG and reduce or eliminate dependence on Russian natural gas to diversify sources of energy.
- Introducing **carbon pricing mechanisms beyond ETSs**. In particular, these include offset mechanisms, carbon taxes, and results-based climate finance. Border carbon adjustments form an offset mechanism to prevent carbon leakage. This mechanism acts as a price signal for continuing to innovate and develop into a low-carbon economy. The revenues generated can be used to remove costs and fees that distort the market.

Mid-term policies (2040)

- Investing in upgrading and modernizing the electricity grid to improve the capacity to accommodate a **higher share of RESs and facilitate their integration into the existing energy system**. Further, a pan-European energy grid for hydrogen should be developed, as should a complete, open, and competitive hydrogen market by 2030.
- Striving for **complete independence from Russian gas and oil**, including those being resold by countries such as Kazakhstan.
- Funding an **interconnection with Africa through Egypt**, as Egypt has significant potential for solar energy and can “charge” European needs. This can include EuroAfrica interconnector to PCIs.
- Enhancing the **electromobility** through investment in charging stations and the necessary grids.
- Engaging **university research** with the private sector in the field of electricity storage through batteries. This could provide new job opportunities for young graduates.
- Improving energy efficiency by **investing in energy-efficient appliances and buildings**. This could reduce energy demand and make it easier to transition to zero-carbon energy.
- Prepare **master plans for EU ports** regarding their infrastructure for alternative bunker fuels, such as ammonia, methane, and hydrogen. Exploring funding opportunities to achieve the **fit-for-55 targets**.

Long-term policies (2070)

- The European Union should **allocate additional funding to support research and development focused on renewable energy technologies**, including solar, geothermal, fusion, and energy storage. This could accelerate innovation and technological advancements, which are essential for the transition to a clean energy future.
- The EU should also consider **building more nuclear power plants in the distant and largely uninhabited territories of Nordic countries**. This would reduce costs for cooling the reactors and would not interfere with wildlife and protected nature.
- Finally, the EU should **perform exchange experiences and collaborate with other regions outside Europe to ensure the greatest degree of progress in renewables**. This could be done through the creation of a pan-European renewable energy agency or through the conclusion of international agreements.

Impact

This proposal will have an important **impact on greenhouse gas emissions**, leading to a shift away from fossil fuels and toward RESs. It could also help **improve air quality and mitigate climate change**. This proposal leads to **new programs and initiatives that promote energy efficiency and it could help to reduce energy consumption**. This would save money for consumers and businesses, and it would also help reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This would be a **major benefit for public health**, as it would reduce the number of people who are exposed to harmful pollutants and, by this means, save lives.

A broader transition to a clean energy economy could create millions of new jobs in the clean energy sector. The International Renewable Energy Agency estimates that the clean energy sector could create up to **28 million new jobs by 2050**, including solar panel installation, wind turbine manufacture, and energy efficiency auditing. These jobs would be high-paying and could help boost economic growth. Additionally, the transition to a clean energy economy would help to **create a more sustainable future** by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and mitigating climate change.



Sustainable Transportation

Group members

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Silvio Junger (LYMEC IMS, Austria)

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Reneta Antonova Ilieva (YMRF, Bulgaria)

Background

The densely populated European continent is ideally suited for a high-speed railway network. Due to its great advantages in terms of environmental impact and passenger capacity, **rail is likely to become a backbone of future transport systems.** Unfortunately, the rail transportation market remains highly fragmented and subject to a myriad of incompatibilities and resulting market inefficiencies. Relative to the smooth air travel market, rail passengers face a number of roadblocks that can lead to a frustrating travel experience.

Scope

Changes to **capital-intensive rail infrastructure are typically costly and time-consuming.** However, there is much to be gained from making software-based changes alone. The unwillingness of many providers of rail services to share **real-time operating data** makes it impossible for third parties to accurately compare services, prices, and carbon footprints or to offer through-tickets combining several providers. **Cheap and simple changes to data-sharing practices** can allow a much higher level of passenger comfort in ticketing process, similar to what exists in the air travel industry.

Main Provisions

An app or a website should be developed that would **allow passengers to compare routes, prices, and environmental impacts for all railway companies for any journey across Europe**. Passengers would also be able to purchase through-tickets from railway companies or third-party providers, making the necessity to buy several tickets from multiple railway companies for a single journey obsolete.

Stakeholder Engagement

This proposal will mainly affect **rail service providers and third-party providers of travel-related services**, providing prices and carbon emission comparisons, as well as ticket vending.

European rail services providers must **guarantee open access to their information on travel and emission details**. They might be reluctant to share this kind of information, but they should find comfort in the idea that the air travel continues to flourish as an industry, even though our proposal for rail being longstanding practice there. Induced demand as a result of higher passenger comfort has the potential to provide a huge boost to passenger numbers.

Companies who seek to offer train journey comparison and ticketing services will be the beneficiaries of our proposal. That their business model is sound in principle can be seen in the numerous successful websites and apps offering our envisioned services for air travels, where the only thing holding companies back from offering the same for train journeys is the **lack of access to necessary information**.



Implementation Roadmap

To enable our vision, **legislative change is necessary**. That would mandate railway enterprises to provide **non-discriminatory access to all travel information**, including real-time operational information on timetables and tariff data through application programming interfaces. The European Parliament already adopted this position in 2018, but the provision was lost in negotiation with the council. This was a mistake, and it must be corrected as soon as possible. The new legislation should also cover environmental data and include open access to CO2 emission equivalents.

We expect **private enterprises to offer the desired services** once they are able to, as the multiple comparable services in the flight market already exist. The commission should remain alert to other possibly emerging difficulties and work to overcome those. As a matter of last resort, if the desired offers fail to manifest, the commission should take action to provide customers with this vital service.

Impact

More remains to be done to **future-proof the railway system**, this proposal is a major step toward a smoother, more efficient, greener, and eventually cheaper transport system for Europe.

Improved comfort in the ticketing process will convince many Europeans of the merits of rail travel, **producing to a sustained shift in demand from short-distance flights to train journeys**. From this proposal, future train travelers will always know that they are receiving the best service, for the cheapest price, and the lowest environmental impact.

This proposal removes a major source of frustration for railway passengers, increasing the attractiveness of railway travel and advancing Europe's green agenda.

Adopting this proposal would create a **new market for rail travel information and ticket sales**, thus also increasing competition between rail services providers by allowing passengers to make informed choices about the best option for them.

What is more, **better interconnectivity and easier travel within Europe** will help draw Europeans closer together and foster a sense of European identity.

Conclusion

Nowadays, Europe and the rest of the world are confronted with one of its most important challenges. The fight against climate change needs us to be innovative and bold in the solutions that we will put forward so do the energy issues we are facing. Young people have made their voices heard by going to the streets, to the media and even their representatives to say: **“We need to act now!”**. That is why the European Green Deal is a good start, but we need to be bolder and more ambitious. That is why tackling this issue not only for the youth but together with them is really important. Young people can contribute a lot to the aims of the European Green Deal and that is why they need to be given the opportunity to discuss and come up with further ideas and solutions while being included in the decision-making processes. **We hope that these proposals will inspire and put in action change for a better future!**

European Liberal Forum

The European Liberal Forum (ELF) is the official political foundation of the European Liberal Party, the ALDE Party. Together with 56 member organisations, we work all over Europe to bring new ideas into the political debate, to provide a platform for discussion, and to empower citizens to make their voices heard.

ELF was founded in 2017 to strengthen the liberal and democrat movement in Europe. Our work is guided by liberal ideals and belief in the principle of freedom. We stand for a future-oriented Europe that offers opportunities for every citizen.

We bring together a diverse network of national foundations, think tanks and other experts. At the same time, we are close to, but independent from, the ALDE Party and other Liberal actors in Europe. In this role, our forum serves as a space for an open and informed exchange of views between a wide range of actors.