

POLICY BRIEF

EUROPEAN ELECTIONS: A YOUNG PERSPECTIVE

2024
MAY



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Background

European Elections 2024

On 30 Jan From June 6 to 9 the European Parliamentary Elections of 2024 are being held. Amidst geopolitical instability, a climate crisis, rising inequality and decisive elections in the US, the coming EU elections are said to be the most important in decades. A predicted right-wing shift is likely to lower ambitions regarding sustainable and social financial policy. This direction has implications for the EU's legitimacy, however: research and a FEBEA survey among engaged young Europeans shows a large discord between the issues they find important, the legislative output of the EU, and the projected direction of the next Parliament.

Last political term saw the Commission's introduction of ambitious climate and social policies, significantly impacting the financial sector. Despite this ambition many experts are pleading for a more rigorous approach, criticising for example the inclusion of gas and nuclear in the Green Taxonomy, and the recent exclusion of the financial sector in the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD). More generally, far-going reporting and transparency requirements, established in the Sustainable Finance Disclosure Regulation (SFDR) and meant to improve the financial sector's ESG impact, have sparked disapproval due to their alleged failure to enforce genuine change in corporate behaviour.

The criticism is unlikely to be addressed during next term. With EP political groups European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) and Identity and Democracy (ID) - outspoken opponents of ambitious climate targets - gaining 28 seats in the polls against a 35 seat loss for the left, climate and social policy is bound to lose priority.

Young Perspective

The projected direction of the EU is at odds with the young European perspective. The young vote tends to be significantly more progressive in European elections. This aligns with the results of a FEBEA survey among young people (ages 20 to 32), showing this generation thinks the **EU should take more action on climate, social justice, and migration**. Respondents specifically mention that emission mitigation efforts should be paid for fairly by the parties responsible. Regarding social issues the results include demands for **better housing across the EU, the renovation of cities in order to make them more livable, and more attention to human rights** in international value chains.

Besides progressive priorities and ideas, most respondents are convinced that the upcoming European elections are fundamental to their future, and therefore think young participation is crucial: "[Young participation] is very important because the EU needs broad and purposeful participation to function, and young people are the ones who can ensure the continuation of the Union."

However, respondents also **experience a lack of inclusion of young people in EU decision making**, generally finding that "there is room for representation but no power." Another participant writes: "There are methods for inclusion, but they are definitely not enough." It touches on the question whether the misalignment between young priorities and the EU's direction has implications for the EU's legitimacy. This is particularly true for the case of climate change: as its consequences are scientifically proven to cause future instability, should the voices of the generation that will live this future not be heard more? As one respondent puts it: "They are the ones who should plan their future."



Conclusion

The discord between the direction of EU politics and the voice of young Europeans signals a need for improved representation and participation of young people. The young generation generally holds more progressive ideas on how, and if, to tackle global problems that will determine their future. By giving young voters more influence on their futures, something highly prioritised by FEBEA and ethical finance institutions, this practice would increase legitimacy of the EU's policy outputs.

Febea

FEBEA – the European Federation of Ethical and Alternative Banks and Financiers – is a non-profit association based in Brussels. It gathers 33 financial institutions whose aim is to finance social and solidarity economy (SSE) and projects with social, environmental and cultural value in 17 European countries, serving more than 700,000 people.

Its objective is to support the exchange of experiences and promote cooperation between social economy and social finance practitioners.

Each FEBEA member is integrated in the SSE Sector in its country, focusing on mobilising savings and equity from responsible citizens and using these funds to finance sustainable development and local communities. FEBEA is member of GECES, the European Commission's expert Group on Social Economy and Social Entrepreneurship and of Social Economy Europe, the main European network of social economy practitioners.

FEBEA members finance:

- The creation of jobs, social employment in particular;
- Social enterprises and social economy;
- The non-profit sector and participatory economics;
- New forms of social entrepreneurship
- People or groups of people who are victims of social or professional exclusion or are unbanked;
- Sustainable development: renewable sources of energy, organic farming, biodiversity, etc.;
- International solidarity and fair trade.



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