

What do women dream about for the future of European democracy?

Curated by Corina Stratulat



Introduction

Dreams can be mirrors into one's soul, expressions of one's supreme aspirations, safe spaces to confront one's deep-seated fears, breeding grounds for creative solutions to problems or the sprouts of tomorrow's reality. As such, dreams are essential at times of tearing down and building anew, like the ones in which we live. When the status quo ante no longer exists and will not return. When our sense of security is threatened, and our democratic values are challenged. When existing principles, instruments, and approaches feel like an increasingly straitjacket and the need for fundamental reform has become imperative for the EU to adapt and thrive.

What do women dare to imagine for the future of European democracy at this watershed moment (*Zeitenwende*)?

To commemorate International Women's Day, I posed this question to female colleagues. My goal was not to have female authors escape the current situation in a fantasy world but rather to encourage them to freely imagine what European democracy should become, irrespective of the present.

My call received 36 contributions authored by women from various EU member states but also the Balkan countries, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Georgia, and Turkey. To help orient the reader, these have been grouped under three different headings that capture

the substance of their message: one includes all entries on the general development of the EU, another brings together all reflections on the evolution of European democracy, and the third contains all pieces linked to women's rights and participation in political affairs. Under each heading, the texts are ordered alphabetically.

All entries testify to the power of dreams to speak truth and ambition. They also reveal the capacity of women to dream big, long term, inclusively, empathetically, and passionately. They highlight the most important problems facing the EU and come up with concrete ways to solve them. Many participants already pioneer or implement in their work the ideas they put forward. Just like their counterparts, the female authors who took part in this exercise are mothers, daughters, grandmas, wives, single ladies, successful and established leaders and opinion-shapers in their fields or at the start of their careers. They have various educational backgrounds, nationalities, life experiences, and ages. But like all women, they are so much more. The strong, clear, and courageous voices that come through their entries to this compendium offer a stark reminder that women's contribution to the future of our European democratic societies and to our Union is as unique, resourceful, and boundless as it is indispensable.

How do your own dreams compare to theirs?
Keep reading to find out...

1. Women's dreams on the general development of the EU



Corinna Hoerst, Advisory Board
Member, Women in International
Security (WIS) Brussels
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I have a dream that Europe is a geopolitical actor, a marketplace, and a guarantor of democratic values – not as a superpower but as an entity inclusive of all its member countries and people.

I have a dream that all people who live in Europe – citizens, visitors, temporary residents, immigrants, and refugees – commit to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and adhere to the European values of dignity, freedoms, equality, solidarity, citizens' rights, and justice.

For us to come closer to this dream, each and every person needs to recognise that there will not be a Europe where everybody lives in perfect harmony. Europe will never be done and never will be perfect. There is no

end point. There is a constant transformation of what Europe is and can become.

Europe is a reactive force, it responds to internal and external affairs and needs. For Europe to be relevant means different things at different times and for different people – as we could see during the financial crisis in 2008, the refugee crisis in 2015, the global pandemic in 2020/21, or the war in Ukraine in 2022.

Europe constantly needs to prove its worth. In order to offer peace, prosperity, and democratic rights, Europe is as much a place as a process where parties promise, cajole, ask, offer, complain, argue, haggle, BUT always compromise to get as close as possible to its best state, for the moment.



Dr. Simonida Kacarska, Director,
European Policy Institute (EPI), Skopje
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I have a dream of a European democracy that would see itself as powerful and as strong as many in its neighbourhood see it. The European democracy of my dreams would not shy away from setting new standards for protection and upholding the rule of law, thus contributing to a peaceful global order. This European democracy would boldly tackle the challenges identified by its citizens and set a pathway to resolving them in the near and not so distant future.

This European democracy would see itself through the eyes of people from all over the world who often risk everything trying to reach its borders. It would accept its flaws and work on remedying them with a strong focus on the protection of human rights. It would realise that in order to remain a desired place, it must deal with the challenges that are at its borders instead of exporting them.

The European democracy of my dreams would keep supporting Ukraine and uphold its promise to the Western Balkans. The European democracy would use its transformational power to assist and integrate a region that has been waiting for three decades to become more like its desired destination. Integrating the remaining part of the Balkans would be a small step for Europe in terms of numbers, but a big step in terms of the signal it sends internally and externally. In doing so, the European democracy of my dreams would rightly claim its role as a normative power that assists societal transformation.

The war on European soil makes this dream seem closer and more distant at the same time. While Europe acts more confidently and provides arms, it does not seek to make use of the transformative and democratising artillery that it has at its disposal.



Brigid Laffan, Emeritus Professor at Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute (EUI) and President of the European Policy Centre (EPC)
@BrigidLaffan

I have a dream of a Europe at peace again, free of bloodshed and the senseless destruction of human life, and where people live. Today in Europe, Ukrainians are dying because they looked West and wanted to forge a democratic future for themselves and their neighbours. I look forward to the end of the imperial impulse in Europe, an impulse that brought enormous destruction to the world. Ukraine's fight against an imperial regime is a fight for democracy and freedom, the freedom to choose is at the heart of democracy.

I have a dream of a Europe that has overcome the authoritarian political forces that have eroded democracy on our shared continent, especially in those EU member states where the rule of law has been weakened. Without a living commitment to the rule of law and shared values, Europe is poorer and European integration is undermined. In addition to the rule of law, corruption erodes democracy and remains a challenge in many member states.

I have a dream of a vibrant and robust democracy in each and every member state and candidate state of the EU. Politics begins at home, and unless democracy is nurtured at the national level, there will not be and cannot be a healthy democracy in Europe.

I have a dream of a Europe in which the complexity of the challenges we face, such as war, the climate crisis, and the integration of differences, are communicated in a way that citizens feel they have a stake in them and the multiple crises we face can be governed. Simple solutions and a climate of fear do not nurture healthy political participation and widespread ownership of the issues.

I have a dream that we never forget what a fragile plant democracy is and that its true worth is only revealed when it is gone.



Jovana Marovic, Member of the Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group (BiEPAG) and former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of European Affairs of Montenegro
@JoMarovic

I have a dream that European democracy will never be in poor health again. This will happen once the EU has (really) become a global player, capable of creating sustainable policies, influencing changes, maintaining peace and stability, and controlling and safeguarding democracy in its member states. For this to be possible, the democratic deficit in the EU's political system should be overcome, the federal elements should finally prevail in its functioning, and the mechanisms for strengthening and guaranteeing democracy must go beyond Article 7 of the Treaty on the European Union.

In my dream, green policies are the key to winning European, national, and local elections and mandates; women share public functions (including presidential and prime ministerial ones) equally and at all levels; citizens are permanently and directly involved in European policymaking, and their voices are heard through concrete decisions.

Finally, my biggest dream (arch-dream) is for the Western Balkans, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, and Turkey to join the EU by 2030. While in [Ismail Kadare's](#) work, the arch-dream can be dangerous for the fate of the empire, in this case, it can help the empire deal with far-right, nationalistic, retrograde ideas, actors and discourses. Bringing all currently aspiring countries into its fold will prove that the EU is capable of exporting democracy, that its transformative policy works, that democracy is a universal and coveted value, and that the Union is stronger when it is wider and more united.



Chiara Rosselli, Co-Founder and
Executive Director, APROPOS Group
@C_Rosselli

I have a dream...in which we choose not to succumb to pessimism and powerlessness over the state of politics and of our democracies today.

Instead, we choose optimism as a tool and an act of rebellion. As a signal to ourselves and others that we will not give in to the “it is what it is” narrative that pervades so many of the spaces we occupy.

We choose to remember that democracy and societal progress take courage, not just tactics. That they require sacrifice and, let’s face it, some pain.

I have a dream...in which we make politics work, for what it is, and should be. An imperfect, delicate art of compromise and dialectic allowing people with different, valid values and lived experiences to prosper together.

I have a dream...for us as think tankers, non-profits, NGOs, and philanthropic foundations to stop pointing the finger outwards and start looking inward and ask ourselves: *when did we stop believing in our own agency as a positive force for societal change?*

I dream of the emergence of a new code of conduct – not for politics, but for us, the sector that is supposed to inspire and challenge, and take risks where politics can’t or won’t.

I dream of finding new ways to support politicians and enrich policymaking.

I dream of a political sector equipped with new communication and collaboration tools, and of policies that benefit from top-notch processes of creative thinking, deliberation, solution-scouting, experimenting, and decision-making across political, ideological, and geographical borders.

I dream of being able to put the community of process designers that we are building with APROPOS at the service of the political sector, policymakers and policy thinkers across Europe. I dream of supporting bold thinkers and doers with fit-for-purpose and impact-driven designs of spaces, exchanges, and processes.

I dream of our sector becoming the research and development investment that politics so sorely needs.

I dream of our sector providing spaces that empower the energy and idealism of youth.

I dream of our sector embodying dignity, pride, and ambition.

I dream of humanising politics and making our sector more accessible, more down to earth, less brutal, and more collaborative.

If this is something we want, not only for ourselves but for future generations of politically minded people, we need to start with ourselves. How we speak. What we dare to say or dream. How vulnerable we allow ourselves to be. How much skin are we willing to have in the game?

I dream of more of us working together across our institutes and sectors. I dream of a creative revolution for politics and a call to action to the world’s creatives to assist us in reimagining how we do the important and noble work that we do on behalf of European democracy.



Svitlana Taran, Ukrainian Research Fellow in the Europe in the World programme at the European Policy Centre (EPC)
@svt_tar

I have a dream shared by millions of Ukrainians these days – they mention it when sending personal wishes to each other for every occasion, either staying in Ukraine or across the world. This dream is about Ukraine’s victory and the end of Russia’s war of aggression that will bring long-term peace and security to the Ukrainian people after years of constant threat and a full-scale invasion of the much larger neighbouring country.

I believe that Ukraine’s victory will re-establish and reinforce its fundamental rights for self-determination, independence, and sovereignty. The Ukrainian people will defend their freedom to join the European family and the free world community. I hope that Ukraine’s striving for systemic changes in their country in line with European values and international standards will become successful, proving that all the sacrifices and losses that Ukraine withstood for its choice have been meaningful. Having paid such a high price, Ukrainians

will never take fundamental freedoms, independence, and sovereignty for granted and will be ready to defend them again.

In cooperation with Ukrainian civil society, I believe that the Ukrainian government will be able to use this historical momentum and further advance to the next stage on its European integration path and will implement all necessary steps to open the accession talks already during 2023. I also hope that the post-war recovery and reconstruction in line with European standards will enable us to modernise Ukraine’s economy and prepare for full integration into the EU internal market. I dream that Ukraine’s victory will comply with all these components and will eventually lead Ukraine to advance further from an EU candidate country to a full-fledged member of the European Union and NATO, which will ensure necessary security guarantees and prosperity for the Ukrainian people.



Aleksandra Tomanić, Executive Director of the European Fund for the Balkans (EFB)
@AleksTomanic

I have a dream of a Europe... I am supposed to have a dream, although, looking at the current reality, dreaming requires a lot of courage, optimism, and a dose of naivety. But let’s give it a try.

I have a dream of a Europe at peace, of a European Union that has managed to overcome the numerous ongoing threats to its democracy.

I have a dream of a European Union without an enlargement policy as completion has been achieved.

I have a dream of a European Union with a strong European level – functional, democratic, transparent, and guaranteeing the principle of subsidiarity, heading a Europe of regions and thus having a governance structure for the future. A Europe where even nation state decision-makers have understood that, as a global player, the EU needs to be strengthened and identities, even national ones, are a matter of personal rights, not governance.

I dream of a European Union where inequalities that threaten to destroy the social fibre of societies have

been addressed and resolved. In my dream, the EU is an area of fair taxation where solidarity comes before tax havens. A European Union acknowledging that productivity and AI have developed thus far and that a universal basic income has turned from wishful thinking into an unavoidable necessity. Citizens of the EU have working hours adapted to present productivity instead of what was the norm decades ago. European citizens are healthier and happier, having more time for family, creativity, community, and charity work.

I have a dream that a sustainable economic model is being implemented, taking into account environmental limits and social needs. A European Union that has removed market logic from areas where it should have never been introduced in the first place – like health, culture, and education. European citizens smile when they remember how they once fell for fake news and conspiracy theories that threatened their societies. I dream they know better.

For my dream to come true, many more people would have to share it. Let’s dare to dream.



Ilke Toygür, Professor of Geopolitics of Europe, University Carlos III of Madrid and Senior Associate, CSIS Europe, Russia and Eurasia Programme
@IlkeToygur

Since Russia invaded Ukraine a year ago, the European continent has gone through many economic, political, social, and military changes. All these and their impact on European democracies require in-depth reflection. With the European Parliament elections just around the corner in 2024, it might just be the right time to get pensive.

My dream for European democracy requires that the EU wins at least three big fights: against inequality, against autocratic tendencies and illiberalism in Europe, and in favour of a new social contract. Why?

The fight against inequality: In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and then war, the EU issued common debt, loosened fiscal rules, and increased financial transfers between and within countries. The state subsidies needed for the green transition are also significant in wealth transfer. What is the impact of all these decisions on inequality? While very important, the equality component is missing from many debates.

The fight against autocratic tendencies and illiberalism: Democracy, the rule of law, and basic rights and freedoms are the essence of the European project. There should be systematic control over them to safeguard the future. No member state should escape scrutiny. And there is more: the EU's policies towards wider Europe should also fight back against autocracy. The EU's long-term interests will only be protected if the Union's relationships with third countries in the region respect a rules-based order.

The fight for a new European social contract: Permissive consensus and constraining dissensus dominated the European integration literature for a long time. In the meantime, the European project moved in the direction of new fiscal rules, further integration on energy policy, and possible common defence procurement, just to name a few. The gap between policies and politics has got wider. It is high time to talk about the European social contract. What do citizens want? Is the European Union working for them?



Alida Vracic, Visiting Fellow if Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen and Director at Think tank Populari, Bosnia and Herzegovina
@Alidav978

I envision a Europe that is bold, imaginative, and courageous. A Europe that embodies its values and acts accordingly rather than simply making statements of solidarity or symbolic gestures.

I dream of a Europe that has clear goals, where democracy is ruled by the many and not just by some who flourish at the expense and exclusion of others.

I imagine a Europe that empowers women to hold leadership roles, invests in them and ensures that women from all backgrounds are central to decision-making processes.

I see a Europe that prioritises minorities and young people, addresses disparities, and works tirelessly to ensure that no one is left behind.

I dream of a Europe that extends its care beyond its borders to include women in Iran and Afghanistan. If we care about our own democracy, we must care just as deeply about theirs.

I hope for a Europe that does not overlook the cost of the unending transition in neighbouring countries, and where slow progress is replaced by robust civic engagement.

I hope for a Europe where new generations are equally passionate about pursuing inclusive, non-discriminatory, and liberal policies with the same fervour that aggressive nationalists pursue their own agendas.

I dream of a Europe that does not belittle young people when they demand climate justice, more quality, and peace but instead champions their cause.

While my hopes for a better Europe are high, I do not place my faith in any single politician or in politics. Rather, I trust the next generation of women and men who speak truth to power using their own authentic and powerful voices.

1.1. CLIMATE CHANGE IN FOCUS



Annika Hedberg, Senior Policy Analyst and Head of the Sustainable Prosperity for Europe programme, European Policy Centre (EPC)
@AnnikaAhtonen

I have a dream that the EU will step up its efforts to enable and accelerate the transition to a more sustainable world, starting now and not tomorrow. I hope that the EU and its member states act responsibly and [align their short-term reactions to the multiple crises we face today with our longer-term goals for lasting prosperity](#). I wish the EU becomes better at combining economic, political, geopolitical, security, societal, moral, climate and environmental considerations when making decisions that affect us and our children.

The EU has the [tools to create the basis for sustainable prosperity](#) in Europe and beyond. It can do this by acting as a rule-maker and enforcer; as an economic powerhouse; as a source of significant funding within the EU and beyond, as well as a mobiliser for private financing; as a convening power; as an innovator and developer of new solutions; as a standard-setter; and as a major producer and consumer.

To build on these strengths and to accelerate the transition to a resilient, competitive and sustainable economy and society, the EU desperately needs courageous and responsible leaders, its members states must align their actions with agreed goals and commitments, it must bring business and people along, and the EU should use its internal and external tools to leverage change also globally.

Today, more than ever, the EU needs unity, collaboration, and courage to do the right thing. Amidst the Russian aggression, growing geopolitical tensions, disruptions to supply chains, global energy and food crises, economic and social repercussions of the pandemic, and the planetary crisis that is threatening life as we know it, we need to ensure that the measures taken will enhance European resilience, sustainability, and prosperity now and in the long term. We need our leaders to lead us into the future we want.



Audrey-Flore Ngomsik, CEO of Trianon Scientific Communication and President of the Brussels Binder
@Audrey_Ngomsik

I have a dream that by 2050, Europe's CO2 emissions will have decreased by 50%, and that we managed to answer to the climate crisis challenges. A decrease of 50% is set in policy, but whether it will be met, remains to be seen, and delivering on the goal would be a major success, albeit not the end of the road.

Tackling the issue of climate change through innovation, citizen participation, and collaboration will strengthen European democracies' capacity to combat short-termism, promote democratic government, and address climate injustice.

As climate-related disasters become recurring, vulnerable populations will be better protected, individual rights and freedom will be safeguarded from being eroded, and European democracies will grow more interconnected.

Climate change transcends national boundaries, so European politicians and citizens alike will have a greater understanding of global issues.

European democracies will seize the chance to address the climate change crisis and make a difference, by using a more inclusive strategy for tackling the issue, such as inter-disciplinary methodologies, diverse insights, and different perspectives, to create equitable solutions to the biophysical, economic, and social issues created by the ecological transition.

Everyone's input regardless of race, gender, economic background, or disability, will be taken into consideration to provide solutions for every single one of us.

And everyone becomes an advocate for climate education, corporate social responsibility, environmental, social, and economic sustainability to affect positive changes on climate.

Rendez-vous in 2050 to see whether my dream came true!

"Rendez-vous" in 2050, to see how right I was!

2. Women's dreams on the EU's democratic evolution



Veronica Cretu, Co-Founder, Innovating Governance Association Austria, Member of the Council of Europe Access Info Group, Founder of Moldova4EU Diaspora Task Force @VeronicaCretuMD

As a professional originally from the Republic of Moldova but working and living in the European Union, my dream is to see my country become part of the bigger Europe. My dream is to see Ukraine join too. A solid European democracy will support our countries in strengthening their democratic institutions and free them from Russia's sphere of influence. I dream of having the UK back in Europe too. It is not the same without Great Britain. That is when we will be able to say that democracy in Europe has matured.

I dream of a Europe free from Russian propaganda. Of Europeans who are able to think critically and understand that disinformation and manipulation, as well as corrupt and compromised politicians, are a threat to the very essence of our democracy. I dream of a European democracy where the rule of law is upheld, and corruption is not tolerated in any shape or form.

I dream of the future of European democracy, where citizens are more engaged in the democratic process through more diverse means of participation. Decentralised policymaking could become more prevalent in the future of European democracy, with decision-making powers distributed more evenly across different levels of government and civil society. I dream of a European democracy in which open discussion around data, privacy, the environment and climate change, peace and security, Artificial Intelligence, renewable energy, migration, the value of diversity, and inclusivity for an open and democratic society prevails.

Let's make Europe the dream we are dreaming of!



Marika Djolai, Independant scholar and Member of the Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group (BiEPAG) @madzarica

To paraphrase Martin Luther King Jr., it would be fatal to overlook the urgency of the moment given the current challenges Europe is facing. Consideration of the future of European democracy must be balanced with efforts to find a peaceful solution to the conflict in Ukraine. For me, European democracy is primarily about safeguarding peace, tackling security challenges, and creating a way of life in which societies and citizens thrive without fear of violence or the experience of atrocities. It also entails access to restorative justice for all, individuals and communities, who have been exposed to harm.

My dream is to create a just and inclusive future because elements of inequality can be found everywhere around us. In a world stripped of identity politics, democracies across Europe should embrace new approaches to steer away from solutions that look good on paper but barely echo in everyday life, where it matters the most.

The EU is a peace project that should strive for European unity and building bridges among all citizens, safeguarding

their rights, and encouraging participation in all European countries and not just in the EU member states. We cannot be satisfied until this border that implies a lesser and a greater Europe is softened and dissolved. It is a balancing act that needs to be done better to ensure all freedoms, for minorities and majorities, including the freedom of religion and the right to life and education.

Experience shows that democracies can rise and grow stronger with the right leadership or turn into *undemocracies* if aspirations and values get swept under the carpet. To prevent this from happening and to enrich European democracy and the development of societies, education is the key. Everyone – irrespective of socio-economic status, identity, or health standing – must have access to education, which expands the scope of engagement and increasing their stock of influence that translates into political and human capital. This is a precondition for participation in today's world.



Ivanina Valeva Hamdi, Project Management Executive, European Policy Centre (EPC)

I have a dream...that one day Europe will promote democracy for all. That all of us will have equal opportunities, respect for each other's differences, and curiosity for the new and unknown that each of us can bring to another.

I wish that the meaning of democracy would not be controversial across nations. That it would be universally understood as more than just the name of a political regime and as the application of an ideology that protects rights, beliefs, and dreams. An ideology that gives everyone the right to express their thoughts but also demands mutual respect for each other's choices.

For me, democracy promotes solidarity not only with one's own people but with others as well. Democratic

decisions should be blind to colour, race, origin, or religion and only concerned with what is right and good for all. Democracy is not synonymous with infinite power; freedom of choice stops when it infringes on others' freedom.

I dream of a Europe that teaches children the 'human' values inherent in the democratic ideology because democracy was created by people and for people's better future. Who better to build our future than the next generation?

I hope one day I will be able to live my dream.



Sabin Lange, Associate Professor at University of Ljubljana's Faculty of Social Sciences
@SabinaKLange

I have a dream of a European democracy that is not only European. It is a democracy that flourishes throughout Europe and far beyond its borders. For the EU must be a truly global actor. For such a dream, the EU's own democracy must be robust, yet diverse, including the free press and civic-minded citizens who take an active part in the democratic life of their communities.

A robust EU democracy is tailored to each level of governance. Local democracy differs from Union democracy, but they share the same principles of liberal, protective, and inclusive societies. In a robust democracy, residents actively participate in the democratic life of their district, town, region, state, and the Union. Their involvement is based on their vision, goals, beliefs, and values, as well as how well they know and understand the consequences of the political choices they choose. To this end, civic education, which includes the work of town councils and the European Council, must become part of the regular curriculum in schools and universities.

In the EU, a strong democracy has checks and balances that cover and cross the various levels of governance. Just like the European Commission is accountable to the European Parliament, the national executives must be held accountable by their legislatures for actions at a national and European level. The free and quality media covering local, regional, state, and global affairs are essential, alongside state-provided mechanisms to mitigate malign interference in democratic processes.

Only with such robust European democracy, can the dream of democracy beyond the Union's borders be imagined as coming true.



Teona Lavrelashvili, Policy Advisor
at the ESU/cd&v, Research Fellow at
KU Leuven and Chairwoman of the
European Alliance for Georgia
@TeonaLav

I have a dream of a more meritocratic and representative Europe. A Europe where opportunity does not depend on your postcode, but where hard work, dedication, and commitment are justly rewarded.

An inclusive Europe that can change the lives of all people, not just those who are highly educated or who cross borders to live and work. A Europe for those who do not usually vote in European or national elections. Because Europe is our continent. It is where we all live and dare to dream.

I know from my own personal experience how hard it can be to integrate. I come from a country outside of the EU – Georgia. I had to struggle to find my place in Brussels. I dream that in the next ten years, my country will move closer to joining the EU. I believe that this will be through hard work and reforms, to which I plan to contribute. After all, it will benefit the EU and Georgia greatly.

Each generation believes they have a harder time than the previous one. However, this time it may actually be true! A teenager or a young graduate leaving education now faces tough challenges to find employment in Europe, when many jobs are changing so quickly due to technological advances. Young Europeans need to be able to dream. And the best ideas should be implemented. It is up to the EU to ensure that all those who want to be part of this project have their efforts recognised. Equality of opportunity and equal access are key values.

A meritocratic society can only function properly if there are sufficient safeguards to ensure equality of opportunity. Hard work ought to be duly recognised, but it should not depend on one's family wealth or geographic postcode. I believe in a Europe for everyone!



Marta Mucznik, Policy Analyst in the
European Politics and Institutions
Programme, European Policy Centre (EPC)
@MMucznik

I have a dream that one day our European democracies will live up to their full democratic potential. I have a dream that in every European democracy, every single person is able to fully contribute to their societies, unencumbered by the circumstances that defined them at birth, by prejudice, or (un)conscious biases.

I dream of a Europe that prioritises merit over privilege, values over interests. A Europe that does not segregate or discriminate, and where every citizen has equal access to education, healthcare, jobs, and growth opportunities. I dream of a Europe that truly protects racial and gender equality and places diversity at the core of its democratic well-being.

I have a dream that our European elites will truly mirror their diverse societies with people of all colours and backgrounds represented in every socio-economic society. That every single European citizen does what they aspire to do and has all the tools at their disposal to realise their passions and dreams. I see democratic societies that are able to protect their citizens without compromising on values and that are invested in enforcing, above all, the rule of law and democratic checks and balances. I have a dream that the strength of European democracies prevails over the forces of authoritarianism both within Europe and abroad. Finally, I have a dream that in Europe one day we may be able to say, “Never Again” and truly mean it.



Nicoletta Pirozzi, Head of the EU Politics and Institutions Programme and Institutional Relations Manager, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)
@NicolePirozzi

I have a dream that the European Union will become a home for all those who see democracy as the highest political and human aspiration. In my dream, the Union will expand to all European countries that respect the democratic principles as enshrined in the Treaties, from Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, and Georgia to the Western Balkans. I dream that the UK will finally re-join its original family and reverse Brexit with pragmatism and resolve. Such a big family will find new rules to live by, agreeing on new supranational competences in the fields of economy, health, foreign policy, and defence; by introducing more effective decision-making rules to overcome vetoes; and making common institutions more accountable and transparent.

In this scenario, the members that fail to abide by common democratic rules will be warned and then punished in a straightforward manner, both financially

and by limiting their voting rights. The Union will be a democratic paradise for those fleeing war, famine, political persecution, or poverty from outside Europe. Legal channels for migration will become the rule and smugglers will lose their business space. The Union will have a common asylum and migration policy, and each country will be ready to welcome and integrate new citizens. The fortress that rejects will be turned into a Roman forum that embraces. No discrimination based on gender, race or religious beliefs will ever be tolerated.

The role of women as a vital part of our societies will be duly recognised and valued, in all sectors and especially in political life. For both its citizens and the rest of the world, the European Union will fully embody the democratic model that our founding fathers and mothers had in mind.



Tena Prelek, Research Fellow, Department of Politics and International Relations (DPIR), University of Oxford
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I have a dream, which should not only be a dream.

Charities should not be used to funnel money to politicians in exchange for favours and undue influence.

Lawyers should not threaten journalists and activists on behalf of their wealthy clients looking to intimidate them.

Land and business registers should openly state the beneficial owners hiding behind offshore companies, rather than concealing them following a misguided — and often manipulated — notion of ‘privacy’.

Assets of oligarchs connected to authoritarian regimes should be re-used for the benefit of the populations whose public coffers they have plundered, and that they have laundered in Western states.

Political groups in the European Parliament should speak up about the corruption scandals involving their own members, rather than only rallying against the scandals involving other parties.

European leaders should be vocal in calling out the undemocratic behaviour of leaders in the EU’s neighbouring countries — especially those that are on the road to EU accession — even when this goes against their short-sighted political and geopolitical interests.

Populations should feel that Europe is supporting their call for democracy and not reinforcing despotic stabilitocrats.

In short, European countries should crack down on kleptocracy, rather than enable it.

After Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the far-reaching consequences of a kleptocracy-fuelled regime could not be clearer. It is my hope that we can use this momentum to make all these dreams a reality.



Sophia Russack, Researcher in the Institutions Unit at the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS)
@SophiaRussack

I have a dream that there will be a more robust supranational EU democracy. EU decision-making will always be both supranational and intergovernmental, which provides the Union with dual legitimacy. However, European democracy needs to be safeguarded not only at the national but also at the EU level.

Citizens will and should continue to protect EU democracy via national parliaments and governments. However, those legitimacy chains are too long. National governments that exercise power at the EU level are not acting transparently and are often not properly checked by their national parliaments. Therefore, supranational democracy needs to be bolstered.

Direct elections to the European Parliament are not enough. The importance and political clout of those elections need to be increased. For this, national parties and governments must step up their game in advertising the EP elections and highlighting their transnational nature.

While the (legislative and budgetary) competencies of the EP have steadily increased under co-decision, too many important decisions are still made without the European Parliament's input. Especially when expanding QMV decision-making in the Council (where individual governments can be outvoted), the simultaneous expansion of the co-decision procedure is vital.

Further, proper accountability mechanisms need to be put in place. In a national democratic system, citizens decide who governs. Even though the EU is not a full-fledged parliamentary democracy, citizens should be able to vote on who should be the Commission president. That could be done by giving the EP a more decisive formal role in the procedure. However, a new procedure to appoint the Commission President should reflect the EU's dual legitimacy by involving both the European Parliament and the European Council.



Zsuzanna Szelényi, Foreign policy specialist, former politician in Hungary, Programme Director at CEU Democracy Institute and author of the book 'Tainted Democracy, Viktor Orbán and the Subversion of Hungary'
@ZSzelenyi

I have a dream: that Russia's war will make Europe more united and secure, and my own country, Hungary, will become a committed part of this new, shared political and security status quo.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine is the most important geopolitical event in Europe since the end of the Cold War and acts as a strong incentive for unity among European states. But what this unity means is still unclear.

The war made European countries realise that a revisionist Russia poses a permanent security risk for our countries, and Europe stood by Ukraine. However, some political actors question this strategy. For example, Viktor Orbán does not believe Russia is a threat to Hungary's security. He calls for immediate peace talks between

Russia and the US, hinting that the war in Ukraine is simply a proxy war. He wants to maintain economic ties with Russia and has said: "There will be Russia after the war". Claiming to be Europe's only rational leader.

In the last decade, Orbán's state-sponsored political and economic circles have built strong connections with Russian state companies. As a result, the government's perception of Russia's threat is distorted, as is its ability to condemn Moscow's war. But Orbán also has purely opportunist political calculations. He expects that the diverting strategic and economic interests among member states and the costs of the pro-Ukraine strategy will eventually stretch the Western coalition. Orbán voices loudly odious, morally unspeakable concerns, sheltering other governments' hesitating tactics. He takes

huge risks in the hope that once the war ends, his ‘realist’, ‘peace politics’ will give him fame and influence.

Orbán’s power political mindset is cynical but also pragmatic. Power politics may not rule the world any longer, but big power competition is far from over: revisionist states are emboldened. Orbán himself is a man of power, ambitioning Hungary to become a European middle power.

Europe’s recent commitment to shape a new European security infrastructure includes the EU membership of Ukraine and the Western Balkans. But even a several-tiers Europe cannot work if national leaders act by different rules. It is time for the European political elite to contain home-grown autocrats and prevent them from playing their power games. There is no European unity until some leaders question the shared European political-cultural status quo and fight a counter-revolution against liberal democracy.



Natasha Wunsch, Professor of European Studies at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland

I have a dream that one day European leaders will have the courage to develop democracy in Europe and take it to its full potential. That they will defend the European project against its internal challengers and embrace a clear vision of shared values to uphold in their discourse and actions. That they will overcome national narrow-mindedness to support the European cause with conviction and energy, and transfer competences to the EU as needed, while assuming their choice before voters. That the European Parliament thrives as an arena of debate and deliberation, flanked by supportive intergovernmental institutions that defend its decisions in the member states.

I have a dream that European citizens will come to recognise the European project and its institutions as the embodiment of their ability to decide their own future, to move freely across the continent, and to build lasting peace together. That they will participate in political life not only via institutional channels but also

by means of civic initiatives to support their European neighbours and those coming to Europe in search of protection and opportunities. That European citizens will form a truly transnational community of shared values that are respected and accepted by all.

I have a dream that Europe will be united, free and define the meaning of a striving democratic community for its neighbourhood and beyond – not by coercion or incentives but by offering a role model for others to emulate in their own way. That Europe’s neighbours will seek to transform their own political systems not to obtain benefits or reward their supporters, but to build stronger and more resilient societies with durable ties to Europe.

I have a dream that the model of European democracy will prevail not as the outcome of competition and confrontation, but as a rational and emotional choice by inspirational leaders and empowered citizens.

2.1. CITIZEN'S PARTICIPATION IN FOCUS



Ieva Česnulaitytė, Founding Head of Research and Learning at DemocracyNext, former Policy Analyst for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and a future fellow at the Institute for Human Sciences
@ICesnulaityte

I have a dream that our innate capacity to collaborate and care for others, so apparent over the past year, will help us overcome autocratic tendencies in Europe.

As the brutal invasion of Ukraine began, everyday people in Europe, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, rose in solidarity: they donated, showed their support, hosted Ukrainians fleeing war and continue to do so.

We can foster people's agency by giving them a meaningful way to continuously engage in public decision making with the help of Citizens' Assemblies – a democratic model that has been perfected and implemented close to 600 times, [as documented by the OECD](#).

In assemblies, governments bring together groups of people who are selected by lot and represent the society at large. Assemblies are empowered to learn, deliberate, build consensus, and develop recommendations that consider the complexities required for solving multifaceted public issues.

[My research](#) shows that deliberative assemblies create the conditions for each of us to meaningfully contribute to the common good, assess information critically, and

harness our collective intelligence. In doing so, they lead to an increased sense of efficacy and agency. Assemblies build democratic resilience in citizens—which helps counteract autocratic tendencies and influences.

Deliberative assemblies have been strikingly successful in tackling difficult policy problems, from constitutional changes to allow same-sex marriage to climate change. Successful assemblies have been implemented in Poland, Hungary, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Estonia. These are not merely democratic “experiments”—there are now permanent assemblies, integrated into local and regional government, operating in Paris and Brussels.

I have a dream that Europe will leap towards the next democratic paradigm of citizen deliberation, with Central and Eastern European countries at the forefront. The compassion and everyday heroism we are seeing in the face of this brutal war show the people are more than ready.



Milena Lazarevic, Founder and Programme Director, European Policy Centre (CEP), Belgrade
@milenalazarevic

I have a dream of a Europe of democracies unburdened by war and conflict, fully tailored to the needs and dreams of young people – our children – and dominated by a strong European Union with over 30 member states. As a mother of two, living in Serbia, surrounded by renewed regional tensions and the fallout of Russia's war on Ukraine, I ask myself every day about the world in which my children will live as adults. It appears that we have not learned any of the lessons of the past and that a small political elite is capturing institutions and public resources one by one in order to advance its own interests. As a result, young people are feeling more and more alienated and are leaving the country in great numbers in search of more just societies and a better quality of life.

The biggest failure of the quasi-democracies in my part of Europe is the political leaders' failure to recognise that their model has no future in a digitalised world. Young people will be increasingly alienated; they will continue to emigrate, and our population will continue to decrease. The economy and the social system will collapse in such a scenario.

So, why not put the future of European democracy into the hands of those who will inherit it? Why not allow young generations to take ownership of their democratic future? Why not think the unthinkable and establish a formal policy and decision-making body that gathers young people from various educational and social backgrounds,

on the basis of representativity, and gives them real power? They could help prioritise public spending, conduct social audits of investment projects and initiatives, or organise public hearings with political leaders (broadcasted on major TV stations) to hold them accountable for their actions. Over time, we could even dream of a powerful multilateral initiative – perhaps tailored after the Open

Government Partnership initiated by former US President Barack Obama – that would encourage democratic governments across the world to commit to empowering young people as pillars of democracy.

I dream of democracies in Europe where the future, rather than the past, decides the future.



Kalypso Nicolaïdis, Chair in International Affairs, School of Transnational Governance, European University Institute (EUI) and Emeritus professor, University of Oxford
@KalypsoNicolaid

I have a recurrent and vivid dream, which starts with an ever-expanding flotilla of explorer ships on the European sea of democratic renewal, ships big and small, crews of all types, sails of all shapes and colours, embarked on a transnational democratic Odyssey.

A dream where a beacon shimmers on the horizon – or is it a mirage? – from a land where all the struggles for human freedom and emancipation have converged in a simple shared injunction: power to the people.

A dream where power is no longer captured, monopolised and manipulated, no longer put to the service of those who extract wealth and privilege from the rest, but where utopians and pragmatists, sayers, doers, and listeners, co-create new ways of sharing power in our modern complex societies.

Embarked on this Odyssey, we fellow dreamers head for the coveted lands of mutual recognition, equal dignity, empathetic relations, collective intelligence, joy, and love, simply.

This is the land of the democratic panopticon. On this land, radical transparency reigns. All collective spending is recorded on the web and subject to the scrutiny of citizens and their organisations.

The traditional model of ever longer chains of vertical delegation has been replaced – well, at least supplemented – by horizontal networks of mutual

empowerment between citizens, their unions, associations, intermediary bodies, and political parties. And Europeans have learned from the many experiences of democratic innovations and participation taking place around the world.

The dream is not a utopia. The flotilla has wind in its sails. The ships are sketching an increasingly detailed map for a fourth branch of government in Europe, a permanent citizens' assembly in the landscape of European political institutions. It is a representative assembly, made up of ordinary citizens selected by lot to serve for a while in turn. It is also an interconnected assembly within the ever-growing network of participatory and deliberative spaces around the continent, in towns and cities, schools, workplaces, theatres, and political or corporate seats of power. It is also a travelling assembly, ready to sit in various configurations, in different places, assembled and reassembled alongside local assemblies and civil society actors. And it is an empowered assembly, trusted to deliberate responsibly on the big issues of our time, in constructive conversation and on equal standing with other claimants on the levers of power. In short, it is an assembly that will herald the advent of a new kind of power for the EU in our new global geopolitics: Citizen Power Europe.

3. Women’s dreams on their own rights and participation in politics



Danielle Brady, Policy Analyst in the Social and Well-Being Programme, European Policy Centre (EPC)
@bradydanielle23

I dream that one day; I will look at a European Council family photo and see equal representation of men and women. The fact that this, in 2023, is a dream rather than a reality is a sad reflection of the female model. Just four of the twenty-seven EU leaders are women: Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen, Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin, Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas and Prime Minister of Italy Giorgia Meloni. Gender parity in political leadership strengthens and enhances the democratic process.

Research shows that citizens believe a government with gender parity is more democratic than one with inadequate gender balance. Yet, despite some progress, women remain outnumbered in member state governments and parliaments. For example, women account for only [32.4%](#) of national parliamentarians across the EU, varying from 46.5 % in Sweden to 13.1% in Hungary. This under-representation of women demonstrates a democratic deficit and must be rectified. To do this requires actions which tackle the root causes of underrepresentation. Structural and societal barriers that discourage women from participating in representative politics must be addressed.

While legislative initiatives such as quotas can play a significant role, they alone will not achieve gender parity. Traditional gender roles and stereotypes; unequal access to key resources such as time, money, and political networks; patriarchal political cultures in parties and parliaments; and caring responsibilities all hinder female representation. Gendered norms prevent women’s participation in political life and contribute to further gender inequalities, such as labour market participation and the gender pay gap.

The benefits of gender equality in politics go beyond upholding social justice and women’s rights; they are fundamental to effective democracy and good governance. However, without reassessing societal, institutional, and political norms that perpetrate gender inequalities across the EU, the photo I envisage will remain a dream for the foreseeable future.



Georgia Mourad Brooks, Founder and CEO The Nine - Belgium’s first female-focused private member’s club

I have a dream that women will be able to walk down the street at night without fear. I have a dream that women will be paid the same as their male colleagues for the same job. I have a dream that women will be offered equal opportunities and tools both in their personal and professional lives. In short, I have a dream that Europe will achieve its goal of becoming gender equal.

Equality is a central tenet of European democracy, and yet the facts show a dismal process in making equality a reality. According to the European Institute of Gender Equality 2022 Index, we are 60 years away from reaching gender equality. Worse still, we see a decrease in equality in several areas, precipitated by the instability of the pandemic and post-pandemic situation.

I strongly believe that both women and men must work together to find practical, purposeful solutions to inequality. The pursuit of gender equality is not a 'woman's issue'; this is a societal issue that affects us all. And we need deeds, not words.

From parental leave to childcare to education to the implementation of quotas – legal frameworks and directives are a start, but they are certainly not the end.

Especially if they are not followed up with action; both benefits and penalties.

I created a world where women are at the centre of everything: a female-focused members' club. However, my ultimate dream is that one day we will live in a world where we do not need such a club. After all, democracy is about freedom and choice. Gender equality is freedom – and a choice.



Ionela Maria Ciolan, Foreign policy and security expert and Director of the Transatlantic Alumni Network, Brussels
@IonelaCiolan

I have a dream that one day women will be equally and inclusively represented in governing and decision-making systems. A truly functioning European democracy cannot be complete without the meaningful involvement and leadership of women in sectors such as security and defence. As women are experiencing conflict differently, their perspectives on security are essential in building lasting peace, and open, diverse, and cohesive societies.

Twenty-three years after the launch of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 Women, Peace and Security (WSP Agenda), women are still massively underrepresented in conflict-prevention, peacekeeping, negotiations or political participation. [According to the UN](#), in the past decade, women were only 6% mediators, 6% signatories, and 13% negotiators in peace processes. In Europe, the situation is slightly better, with 30% of women taking part in the [defence and crisis management missions of the EU](#). Nevertheless, the successful implementation of the WSP Agenda is threatened by

rising autocratic, illiberal, and far-right movements. Patriarchal and conservative ideas, propagated offline or online, are gaining ground within segments of the European population. This coincides with a backslide in women's rights and equality, aggravated further by two years of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As women's civil rights are becoming a battlefield for ideological political clashes, gendered representation and participation are crucial for protecting and promoting democracy. There is a [direct correlation](#) between women's rights and democracy. The most resilient countries to authoritarian and illiberal tendencies are those in which the level of female political mobilisation and participation is the highest.

The future of European democracy is female! Only through an equal and inclusive representation of women in governing and decision-making systems will European democracy survive.



Camille Dobler, Head of Research, Missions Publiques
@CamilleDobler

I have a dream, that women can not only aspire to male roles, on an equal footing with men, but also subvert the borders that assign them into determined spaces. I dream of a society in which women are not confined between the individual and the collective, affects and rationality, private and public, nature and society, left coping in an atmosphere of enforced political correctness or bending into outdated social paradigms. Subverting those borders is a first step to inventing a new way of doing and seeing politics: a more joyful and fair one, where all genders would be given the keys to having an equal impact on the decisions that

concern them. One that does not require a woman to be of a certain colour, to have had a certain education, to live by a certain lifestyle, to be of a certain age, to wear certain clothes, or to belong to a certain class to be seen, and see herself as legitimate to speak up. One where women are no longer pressured to be all things perfect to all people but can thrive fully as they truly are and feel, in parliamentary assemblies, the corridors of Berlaymont, public squares, universities, streets, Zoom meetings, social media, and at home, and by doing so, show the way to a more inclusive and participatory European democracy.



Alina Girbea, Co-founder of the 'Femei in Politica' (Women in Politics) project and President of the Union Save Romania Benelux Branch
@alinagirbea

In my dreams, Europe is led equally by women and men and we don't even notice it.

Imagine waking up in a world where suddenly brown-eyed people are considered unsuitable for politics. A world where 80-90% of parliaments are made up of blue or green-eyed people, with the occasional exception of brown-eyed members, who are celebrated as strong and somehow special for having made it, despite the category to which they belong. This is how our European democracies would have appeared to an anthropologist arriving on Earth from another planet a few decades ago. This is how they still largely look today. Only that it is not brown-eyed people who are excluded from the corridors of economic, cultural, intellectual, and political power, but women.

It is disheartening to still have to explain in 2023 that a healthy democracy is one that guarantees the representation of all societal segments, their particular needs, and their interests. It is tiring sometimes to repeat what should be obvious: that the small injustices that might come with temporary quotas are a small and necessary price to pay if we want to restore equal chances after centuries of inequality. But repetition seems worthwhile when I see more women in top positions and men supporting this cause. I will continue to be a militant for gender equality until my dream of an improved European democracy comes true: one in which being a woman becomes as irrelevant as the colour of one's eyes.



Shada Islam, Founder of New Horizons Project, a global advisory company and Senior Advisor at the European Policy Centre (EPC)
@shada_islam

I have a dream that women leaders, those in power as well as those poised to assume leadership, will finally have the confidence and the space to develop and celebrate their truly authentic feminine selves.

The focus on numbers, on getting more women into politics and government, the military, management roles, and on to boards needs to be complemented by an emphasis on the qualities of leadership and what these women actually do once in power.

Little will change if women are merely added on to existing patriarchal structures and remain unwilling or unable to delve into and use their authentic female qualities. We got into the mess we are in now by leaning in and emulating the old, tired, and failing Superman leadership style.

Tackling the inter-linked risks of war – even nuclear conflict – as well as rising inequalities, far right populism, climate change and other issues, require that we elevate our appreciation of skills, which are often decried as feminine and 'soft'.

It is important to care for and empower women so that they can become more than just female versions of men. Our emphasis should be on the qualities of women in power, their ability to be unashamedly feminine, authentically feminist, and inclusive. We need women leaders who can combine authority with patience and power with generosity, kindness, and concern.

New Zealand's former Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern is vivid proof that it can be done. So is Scotland's First Minister Nicola Sturgeon. What a pity that both have left politics amid suggestions that online abuse and harassment are at least one reason for their decision.

The world can be a hostile place for most women, but those who stand out because they embody authentic feminist values face even more venom than those who play by male rules.

That makes a transformational redefinition of women's power that celebrates truly feminist leaders both necessary and urgent.



Alexandra Martin, Visiting Fellow of Practice at Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford
@m_alexandra_

I have a dream in which women's equal participation and leadership in political and policy life is not a demand but a default. If this condition is met, growing evidence shows that societies face less inequality and more development across all political, social, economic, and cultural aspects of life. To this end, it is imperative that we look beyond an equal share in parliamentary or ministerial seats, achievable through quotas, for example. Policymakers should pay close attention to the things that make it possible for both men and women to contribute to decision-making in a fair and equal way.

According to [UN Women data](#) from September 2022, only 28 countries globally had women as Heads of State and/or government. At the current pace, it will take another 130 years to achieve gender equality at the highest echelons of political leadership. Only 21% of global government portfolios were held by women, which means that gender parity at the government level will not be achieved before 2077.

In the European Union, just a little over 32% of national parliament seats were held by elected women at the end

of 2022, while in the European Parliament, the ratio is slightly higher, reaching 40% of female representation at the last constitutive session of 2019. Furthermore, at the political executive levels, only 22% of the Heads of State and/or Government of the EU 27 were women at the end of 2022, according to the European Institute for Gender Equality.

We need to start now by removing socio-economic barriers to political participation at all levels, from local to European, by implementing targeted gender-mainstreaming policies and crafting laws based on gender-disaggregated data. We could target the development of a pipeline of diverse, gender representative talent in local and national political parties through electoral reform laws, gender equality awareness, education, and political leadership commitments. Lastly, we could educate our public better by countering societal gender stereotypes and discrimination while championing a real gender-inclusive political environment that serves the needs of the entire society.



Laura Rayner, Policy Analyst in the Social and Well-Being Programme, European Policy Centre (EPC)
@lerayner

I have a dream that one day women will have the capacity to fully engage in our democratic systems. However, until considerable progress is made in tackling the gender care gap, pay gap, pension gap and all other gaps which still unambiguously demonstrate that equality between women and men remains a speck on the horizon, many women will not be able to make their voices properly heard.

In the optimism of the 1980s and 1990s, many young women were told that the world was their oyster and that they were only limited by their dreams. However, while women were being told that they could have it all, no one was simultaneously telling young men that they needed to step up and take on some of women's traditional responsibilities. While career paths, which were previously the domain of men are now open to women, all tasks that are involved in rearing a happy and healthy family remain broadly unchanged. But now, they must

be performed in a society that requires the majority of both parents to work. Gender stereotypes in child-rearing continue, aggravated by persistent gender pay inequality and a lack of necessary infrastructure to support the involvement of parents in the workplace. As a result, it is primarily women who are left trying to make the two complex puzzles of a job and family fit together.

Of all the things that working mums have to deal with on a day-to-day basis, making time for political engagement has got to be way down on most to-do lists. Nevertheless, our democratic model will not be stable or fully functional until women are properly represented and fully participate in politics. This will not happen until women are actually able to involve themselves. This requires fair pay, reasonable hours, family-supportive benefits, flexible work policies, and a massive shift in care stereotypes.



Giulia Torchio, Events and Front Desk Assistant, European Policy Centre (EPC)

I have a dream in which the European Union emerges as the leading promoter of gender equality. An equality rooted in a multidimensional understanding of gender, challenging the normative approach that traditionally focuses on the physicality of bodies and the dichotomy between female and male. I dream of an openly feminist Europe, where everyone is treated equally. And I hope that all European institutions can lead by example in this regard.

In my dream, EU gender strategies are aimed at concretely tackling inequalities rather than promoting neoliberal and flexible labour markets that do not protect workers. They also go beyond the

underwhelming implementation of pink quotas. I dream of strong social commitments agreed at the EU level (e.g. the Directive 2019/1158/EU on work-life balance) to be put into practice in the national arena based on intersectional and cross-cutting approaches informed by feminist analysis. Only then will national governments be able to move away from patriarchal approaches to politics, which are so clearly reflected in the male and stale configurations in the Council of the EU and the European Parliament.

I dream of many things but above all, I dream of living in a feminist present, rather than simply hoping for a future that is female.



Lisa Witter, Co-founder and CEO of Apolitical Foundation
@lisamwitter

I have a dream that a ‘democratically elected politician’ is one of Europe’s top ten most respected jobs. What would be different in that world? I suggest a more just, equitable, and sustainable Europe.

This dream will first require us to change our narratives about politicians. It will require us to believe it is possible. Most politicians are intrinsically motivated citizens whose desire to bring about positive change has led them into politics. Pause before you say, “All politicians are (negative comment)”. I bet you can name at least one you admire.

Second, we need to support politicians: the ones we already respect in office and the future leaders we want to be elected. When was the last time you sent a note of thanks to a politician whose work you like?

We should be able to recruit and prepare the politicians we want, as we do for other professions. At the [Apolitical Foundation](#), we see a surge of political leadership entrepreneurs running political leadership incubators around the world to recruit and train new, different, courageous, and ethical people – especially women – to go into politics. This trend should be encouraged to continue.

I have a dream that every child from every background can grow up thinking that they too can be a politician and be proud to become one. Each of us can contribute to making this dream come true.



Emma Woodford, Chief Operating Officer, European Policy Centre (EPC) @EmmalnEUrope

I have a dream... such a strong expression! Before I go further, I would like to acknowledge the power that Dr Martin Luther King gave the phrase on 28 August 1963. Standing on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, his speech was heard around the world and became embedded in our collective consciousness as a milestone in the Black civil rights movement.

Dare I now, as a white woman working in a privileged setting in Europe, use the same phrase? After some reflection, I decided that yes, I could. Why? Because the dream of Dr. Martin Luther King has not yet been fully realised, and as he so succinctly put it, our freedoms are inextricably bound to each other. My dreams are straightforward: to see European leaders truly represent all Europeans and to see kinder, more inclusive forms of leadership in all European countries.

In my dream, equity is placed above selfishness, inclusion above greed, diversity above superiority, and kindness above competition.

In my dream, the media and society do not vilify people who are different due to ill-perceived norms of white superiority; education and health systems do not discriminate against people who are black or poor; women in politics are not hounded for the way they dress and judged more harshly than men for their mistakes. Politicians with a strong moral compass are consistently successful, without fear of burnout or constant recrimination. My dream is the multicoloured rainbow flag of the LGBTIQ+ movement, where anyone is free to love people of the same gender or persuasion.

My dream is of a Europe where intersectional feminism is the norm, meaning that leadership is based on the values and principles of equity, and all people are free from external barriers to pursuing their own dreams.

The **European Policy Centre** is an independent, not-for-profit think tank dedicated to fostering European integration through analysis and debate, supporting and challenging European decision-makers at all levels to make informed decisions based on sound evidence and analysis, and providing a platform for engaging partners, stakeholders and citizens in EU policymaking and in the debate about the future of Europe.

The **European Politics and Institutions** programme covers the EU's institutional architecture, governance and policymaking to ensure that it can move forward and respond to the challenges of the 21st century democratically and effectively. It also monitors and analyses political developments at the EU level and in the member states, discussing the key questions of how to involve European citizens in the discussions over the Union's future and how to win their support for European integration. The programme has a special focus on enlargement policy towards the Western Balkans, questions of EU institutional reform and illiberal trends in European democracies.

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