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**HOW  
TO INVOLVE  
ALL YOUTH  
IN THE  
EUROPEAN  
PROJECT**

# **EUROPE THROUGH YOUNG EYES**

**Exchange, Explore, Exhibit**

Erasmus+ KA2

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## INTRODUCTION

In political education, "learning by doing" scores among the most efficient methods. This is why the YES Forum and its members have, for several years now, acknowledged the potential of political simulations for raising EU awareness among the European youth.

**Political simulations are an innovative, powerful** tool designed to involve participants in “make-believe” politics to teach them how political institutions work, while promoting their civic participation. By roleplaying as politicians and key stakeholders of the political process, young people get a hands-on experience, ensuring an ideal educational impact.

However inclusion remains an issue in this field: political simulations are very often not adapted to a wide diversity of profiles. YES Forum started addressing this through a previous Erasmus+ project, “YourEP”. Designed as an experiment and through a participatory approach involving a diverse group of young people, it first identified key principles to make political simulations as Inclusive – regardless of participants’ profiles and difficulties – and Accessible – regardless of participants’ knowledge of or interest in politics and the EU – as possible.

Building upon this success a new Erasmus+ project, Europe3E (“*Europe through young Eyes: Exchange, Explore, Exhibit*”), was born to pursue the same effort. It has offered the opportunity for a new experimentation to fine-tune the previously identified principles, as well as more hindsight to detail the implications of these principles in the guide you are now reading!

This guide, in order to promote the use of political simulations through the inclusion of more and more diverse participants, will **make a case for this powerful method in the first part**, and detail the principles identified by the YES Forum to **make such initiatives as accessible and inclusive as possible in a second part**.

The following parts will illustrate how these principles can be applied through concrete examples while reflecting the context in which Europe3E had to navigate and the impact it had on how these principles were applied concretely.

The **third part will indeed illustrate “what should have been”**: what were the plans to organise a political simulation of the European Parliament for a reasonably big group in a transnational context in an inclusive and accessible manner ... before the Covid-19 outbreak. As these theoretical plans are still rooted in previous concrete experiences, they have proven their efficiency in regard to inclusion and accessibility, and can therefore serve as inspiration for organisers facing few Covid-19 restrictions. Or hopefully, in the long-term, none at all.

A **fourth, final part will show how the YES Forum coped with the Covid-19 pandemic**, and especially how the original plans were adapted not only so that a political simulation could still happen, but also so that it remained inclusive and accessible despite new limitations.

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# 1 | SIMULATING POLITICS: SURE, BUT ... WHY?

## 1| What is a simulation?

A simulation is the recreation of scenario-based environment, where those involved can experience real-world situations. Through active learning techniques participants are able to interact and apply previous knowledge and practical skills to solve problems.

A simulation is then a simplification of the reality. By being so, it provides the participants the tools to experience and understand an existing process and object.

It represents a pedagogical shift from the traditional learning environment where the professor is at the centre of the lecture and the sole responsible for transmitting the knowledge; to an environment where the participant is at the centre, being able to build their own knowledge and to develop skills.

Political simulations offer enjoyable learning tools where participants impersonate existing or created actors – from the politics and the media, for example – to recreate situations inspired in existing environments. Thus it can help better understanding not only theoretical concepts but the whole functioning of a certain political body.

Because they immerse in the simulated situation, participants are able to make decisions and experience the outcomes of their actions, creating in them a sense of responsibility. It enhances their critical reasoning and thinking.

Political simulations can be especially important for participants from socially-economically vulnerable backgrounds. Due to existing symbolism and very strict protocols – such as the use of special language and specific clothes – real-world political environments can be perceived as

very distant from their day-to-day lives. This can lead to a lack of interest, to a feeling of rejection and also to fear of understanding. A simulation can breach these barriers, showing the participants that it is not such a distant world and that they can – and should – participate.

Simulations can help young people discover their voice and their place in society!

## 2| What are the purposes of simulating politics?

The decision to use political simulations can be related to three different purposes that are not mutually exclusive. This means that it is possible that only one main purpose can be present while preparing a simulation; but it is also possible that all of them are envisaged by the facilitators of the simulation.

SUBSTANTIVE KNOWLEDGE

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

GROUP BUILDING

**Substantive knowledge:** by having this purpose in mind, organizers and facilitators of the simulation are more interested that the participant will be able to learn about the topic that is going to be discussed. The focus is on the content of the simulation. It allows participants to get acquainted with a certain topic, by conducting previous research, reflecting upon its different dimensions, and deep diving into the subject during the discussions. There is a greater flexibility in the rules of procedure.

For example: If the purpose of a political simulation is that participants develop and apprehend knowledge on the situation of migrants and refugees in Europe, it would not matter which political body will be discussing it. The European Union (EU) is not entirely competent to rule over certain aspects of it; for example the EU has limited competence to discuss subjects related to migrant integration in Member States. However this real-world limitation can be lifted so that participants can debate more freely about the subject.

**Skills development:** the focus is on the process and on the negotiation dynamics. As rules and procedures of political bodies can be confusing and hard to be explained only through words, re-enacting them can help participants better understand their functioning and dynamics. During their previous research, participants will be more interested in learning about the fundamental parts of the institutional body that they will be recreating.

For example: for simulations of the European Parliament, in which the focus is on understanding the functioning of this European body, the facilitator will try to make this experience as closer to the reality as possible. Of course it is almost impossible to try to replicate every existing rule of procedure – and it is also not the goal, as we have presented in the previous section, simulations are simplification of the reality. But the goal would be to apply it as much as possible and, when possible, present to the participants the changes that were made.

**Group building:** simulations offer a positive environment to function as ice-breaker and to help the development of a group identity. Participants will share experiences, develop skills and live the process together. The whole course of the simulation can bring participants closer.

### 3| Why do simulations?

The decision to carry out a simulation can have several benefits, not only for the participants but also for the facilitators.

The academic literature on political simulations agrees on a clear consensus: at worst they are at least as effective as traditional teaching methods, at best they show significant improvements in the learning outcomes of participants in the following main categories.





## 2 | HOW TO TWEAK YOUR SIMULATION...


### **...TO MAKE IT ACCESSIBLE AND INCLUSIVE, ADAPTED TO YOUR PARTICIPANTS' SPECIFIC NEEDS**

Designing your political simulation is a great start, guaranteeing a huge impact on its participants already. But to aim for a maximum positive impact, you should also take time to think about inclusion and diversity in your simulation!

To help you, this part will present a set of basic principles to apply when designing a political simulation while making it accessible to all youth, regardless of their knowledge, skills, special needs etc.

These principles will remain a bit abstract in this part, with few examples, so that they can be adapted to diverse situations. They will, however, be illustrated in more details in the third and fourth parts of this guide: there, you will get to discover how these principles were applied (and developed!) by the YES Forum in several Erasmus+ projects including a simulation of the European Parliament. This illustration will present the process that was led itself, and provide concrete examples of results etc (e.g. extracts of documents, tools ... which were used to apply these principles).



PLEASE NOTE! 

This is an already rather extensive yet probably not exhaustive list of principles; in any case it can represent altogether quite a lot for any organiser. Inclusion doesn't need to go full scale from the very start though, **be pragmatic and choose your priorities!**

**These principles can be applied at various stages of designing a political simulation.** You can address them from the very start and make sure to embed these in your early reflections, but you can of course start designing your simulation, conduct an “inclusion check” (e.g. slip into youth shoes: “How would I feel in such a simulation? Anything I'd change to make participation easier?”) and then tweak some aspects of your original design accordingly. Finally, you can also carry out your political simulation directly, and assess it afterward (e.g. “Were participants representative of youth diversity? Who was over-represented, who was missing?”), reflecting on what can be changed through these principles' glasses to make it more inclusive next time!

## 1 | Inclusive political simulations: Why?

As explained in the first part, the educational potential of political simulations is undeniable. “Learning by doing”, when it comes to civic education, may be the most potent method: how can one understand the complexity of a political process better than by experiencing it from the inside?

A lot of public and private initiatives offer young people such experiences. However, the underrepresentation of youngsters with fewer opportunities – in the Erasmus+ dialect, youth experiencing any kind of obstacle to take part in such activities (details below) - is even more striking in the specific case of political simulations. To a large extent, this underrepresentation is due to these activities' design (no blaming, no shaming of course, achieving the organisation of a political simulation itself is, in itself, already quite a challenge!) and can be improved by tweaking these designs in small yet meaningful ways, making it easier for all youth to join and share the fun.

### Barriers to participation in political simulations

Numerous obstacles indeed often make it difficult – if not impossible – for youngsters with fewer opportunities to participate:

- If they don't belong to the right social environment, they usually lack information and awareness about such opportunities;

- Many political simulations are designed for students, de facto expecting a certain level of knowledge, hard and soft skills from participants, and excluding all youth not pursuing higher education or from a “distant field” (i.e. compared to political science or social sciences in general);
- Participating fees – and very often, travel expenses as well – prevent youngsters with financial difficulties to participate, for the more ambitious political simulations;
- The required level of English to take part in such events, when organised at the international level, is systematically too high for youngsters with fewer opportunities;
- The organisation of these events itself, its complexity, and the level of knowledge required to take part, also make them inaccessible to many youngsters.
- Young people with a lack of social skills (e.g. “lack” in this case can mean not being at ease in a group, comfortable with speaking in front of an audience etc), even when interested in the topic(s), may refrain from joining.

And that is just the tip of the iceberg!

### **Inclusion in political simulations, a way to unleash their full potential for those who can benefit it the most**

So in a majority of situations, political simulations attract mainly law students, European affairs students, or are sometimes organised for high school students. Which is completely fine, as it complements their formal education and is 100% absolutely relevant in their curricula.

However, benefits to these participants are “marginal” compared to other potential participants: they already know a lot about how politics work and rather have details to learn and not general basic knowledge about it (e.g. in an EP simulation, EU affairs students don’t learn how the EP works – they know it already thanks to their studies – but they “refine” their learning about it, like learning how tricky finding a compromise on a draft bill is etc). Participants who don’t have such knowledge have therefore the most to learn: opening simulations to them can therefore achieve a much bigger impact.

That’s not to say that simulations should focus ONLY on participants with special needs, no knowledge on politics etc: the perfect simulation has an adapted place for everybody!

## 2 | Inclusive political simulations: How?

So, where to start to make sure your political simulation will be inclusive, accessible to all participants, regardless of their knowledge, skills, needs, personal background ...?

Before considering the promised set of principles, you should first assess your target group’s needs – you certainly know it well enough though, so it will be easy to slip into its shoes and imagine how a political simulation can feel!

To make it easier, use existing frameworks to categorize your target group’s profile when it comes to special needs. The European Commission’s “Erasmus+ - Inclusion and Diversity Strategy in the field of Youth” remains, for that purpose, a very practical tool. Its framework can’t, of course, account for the complexity of a young person’s specific situation, but it will provide you with an easy and understandable framework to support your further reflections. It defines “young people with fewer opportunities” as follows:

*“young people who are at a disadvantage compared to their peers because they face one or more of the exclusion factors and obstacles below. The following situations often prevent young people from taking part in employment, formal and non-formal education, trans-national mobility, democratic process and society at large:*

- *Disability (i.e. participants with special needs): young people with mental (intellectual, cognitive, learning), physical, sensory or other disabilities etc.*
- *Health problems: young people with chronic health problems, severe illnesses or psychiatric conditions etc.*
- *Educational difficulties: young people with learning difficulties, early school-leavers, lower qualified persons, young people with poor school performance etc.*
- *Cultural differences: immigrants, refugees or descendants from immigrant or refugee families, young people belonging to a national or ethnic minority, young people with linguistic adaptation and cultural inclusion difficulties etc.*
- *Economic obstacles: young people with a low standard of living, low income, dependence on social welfare system, young people in long-term unemployment or poverty, young people who are homeless, in debt or with financial problems etc.*

- *Social obstacles: young people facing discrimination because of gender, age, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, disability, etc., young people with limited social skills or anti-social or high-risk behaviours, young people in a precarious situation, (ex-)offenders, (ex-)drug or alcohol abusers, young and/or single parents, orphans etc.*
- *Geographical obstacles: young people from remote or rural areas, young people living on small islands or in peripheral regions, young people from urban problem zones, young people from less serviced areas (limited public transport, poor facilities) etc.*

*[...] The ‘comparative disadvantage’ is important, because being in one of the situations referred to above does not automatically lead to fewer opportunities compared to peers (not all people from minorities are discriminated, a person with a disability is not necessarily disadvantaged if the environment is adapted etc.). “*

With that framework in mind, it will be easier to understand how the principles below can address – and solve – specific obstacles, and later on to focus your efforts on the most relevant principles for your target group’s needs.

### **Diversify the audience**

A balanced, representative mix of participants is an asset itself: besides the bigger impact you could achieve as explained above, participants can also make your work easier! Experienced, knowledgeable participants in politics and simulations can tutor “newbies” for instance, or very outgoing (i.e. “with high social skills”) participants can contribute to an atmosphere encouraging the most shy of their peers to speak up.

To diversify your audience, reach out and extend your network if needed!

- If you are an already experienced simulation organiser willing to improve its event’s inclusiveness, you can team up with social NGOs in particular: they can share their expertise in youth outreach, invite their target group’s to your activities for a mutually beneficial exchange.
- On the other hand, if you work with disadvantaged youth: partner up with a simulation organiser!

Here are a few ways to find new partners:

- Political simulation organisers: besides each country’s relevant public institutions (political education agencies and such), consider having a look at EU-wide networks to locate their members closest to you. In particular, BETA Europe (<https://www.beta-europe.org/>) is relevant as it is a network of European Parliament simulations, and JEF Europe (Young European Federalists; <https://jef.eu>) organise very diverse political education activities at the local level all over Europe, including political simulations.
- Social NGOs : EU-wide networks are also a good starting point if you don’t have an extended local network of partners yet. Try Social Platform ([www.socialplatform.org](http://www.socialplatform.org)) or, why not ... YES Forum ! (<https://www.yes-forum.eu/>)

### Participatory design – give a say to participants

Nobody knows more about someone’s knowledge, skills, needs, background etc than this “someone” in particular! Which means that giving a say to your target group’s when designing your simulation will ensure it reflects its specific needs, as choices will have been made with young people, not just “for” them.

This co-ownership of your activity should be a constant effort, from developing the first concept for your simulation to evaluating it at the very end. There are many ways to do so: you can include representatives of your target group – ideally, future participants themselves – in all decision making, especially organisational meetings, but you can also consult them at any time to “steer” the design in the right direction by offering them multiple choice (e.g. an online poll to choose the simulation’s topics).

### Ongoing support

In a diverse group, participants will be more or less autonomous, comfortable with the simulation’s process, requirements etc. Participants who are less comfortable with some aspects (e.g. little knowledge about politics in general such as its vocabulary, speech impediment making it harder to speak in front of a hemicycle etc) will need support to make sure the obstacles they experience don’t prevent them from taking part in the simulation.

To provide that support, adapt to your capacities:

- Social and youth workers can be included in the simulation itself: as participants, they can young people “from the inside”, while remaining on an equal footing;

- Mentors: Identify participants who are the most autonomous, usually because this is not their first simulation, and ask them to team up with other participants and help them if needed;
- Volunteers: some young people with experience in such activities can be given a special role, instead of being participants, to support any participant in need.

In the best situation, this support should not stigmatize participants by making them stand out from the crowd because they have a guardian angel. Volunteers should keep that in mind for instance and offer help to all participants.

### **Include accessible learning solutions**

Joining a political simulation without prior knowledge of politics – from its basic vocabulary to its detailed processes – is an extremely stressful situation. It will, if not taken into account and tackled, simply prevent many participants to join: not because the doors are closed to them, but rather because they will “self-censor” themselves out of a lack of self-confidence resulting from their “insufficient” knowledge of politics.

A first way to tackle this issue is, very simply, to advertise your simulation explicitly as a (fun) learning activity requiring no prior skills or knowledge. It can’t be implied only: make sure it stands out on your flyers for instance!

Moreover, to put all participants on an equal footing before the simulation itself in terms of political knowledge, offer them adapted and accessible learning solutions. You can for example include “pre-simulation activities” to learn the basics in person, with group activities and non-formal methods. You can also share some of the many learning tools, games, quizzes, podcasts, Youtube videos ... that the Internet offers you for free, with such a diverse offer that you will always find something adapted to your young participants (e.g. in your language, more or less detailed to adapt to their starting point, relying on text or visuals to adapt to different learning styles etc). Ideally, a mix of all of that will be perfect!

### **Learning the fun way**

Roleplaying in itself is a fun, playful experience. However, in “political simulation”, many people will notice “political” first, and think “Wow, serious stuff there”. Think of some tricks to make sure your participants are not just a homogeneous bunch of politi-geeks!

Some “fun components” will provide several advantages regarding inclusion and accessibility:

- Making your simulation more attractive and enjoyable even for young people who are not spontaneously interested in politics at first.
- Helping participants focusing on learning about the process: with a funny topic for instance, they will just need to be creative and rely on their imagination to take part in debates, without any need for some expertise on specific, sometimes technical issues!
- Introducing participants to real-life issues through a fun shortcut, as a parallel can easily be made between a fun topic and actual issues!

The topic(s) of your simulation is the easiest way to add some fun to it: think of a provocative but silly legislative proposal for instance, guaranteeing some laughs during debates!

### Keep it simple!

In designing your political simulation, you will face a dilemma: sticking to actual politics as much as possible and ending up with a realistic yet complex simulation, or simplifying actual politics and ending up with an easier simulation which, though, does not reflect how things really work 100%.

When searching for the right balance, adapt to your future participants. In general, it is worth choosing the way of simplicity in any case:

- It will be open to young people regardless of their appetite for politics and its complexity: the ones interested in “superficial” aspects will be able to join, while the “hardcore roleplayers” interested in the most tricky aspects (e.g. negotiating a political alliance, behind the scenes talks and compromises, backstabbing politics etc) will nonetheless be able to unleash their roleplaying frenzy!
- Think of your political simulation as a future “map to actual politics”: if it succeeds in giving the right basic knowledge on politics, it will be the key to open participants’ minds to politics’ complexity and diversity later on. For instance, they will get the basic vocabulary and knowledge to understand news articles about politics, and dig deeper from then on.

Besides your simulation’s main processes – the political mechanisms and how it will simulate them – there are many other aspects to consider, for which simplicity is also an asset. You may be tempted to make the simulation more realistic by “enforcing” a dress code (e.g. MPs usually don’t wear flip-flops, that is even forbidden in many parliaments): however, that will create a “symbolic” obstacle by forcing participants to mimic formal behaviours they may not

comfortable with, or even hate altogether in actual politicians. And what of young people who don't a suit or “formal enough” attires? Moreover, simplicity in these aspects can also help focusing on the legislative process itself by overlooking its most formal, ceremonial and yet not-so-indispensable aspects.

## Flexibility

Your participants will have diverse profiles, most probably, with a merry mix of levels of knowledge, hard and soft skills, personalities, needs, difficulties ... and there is no “one fits all” solution to make the simulation adapted to all of them.

Well, there might be one: give participants some margin in how they can engage in the simulation! Such flexibility will make sure participants can take part regardless of their specific situation. It can be implemented in many ways:

- Keep your simulation's timing flexible, to add breaks if needs, or shorten them if participants really want to keep debating etc. In real life, MPs themselves can usually vote to take a break in the middle of a seating after all!
- The roles can offer adapted missions to participants: a young person who would die from social anxiety when speaking in front of an audience will not thrive as a MP for instance, but can probably manage one-on-one interviews as a journalist. Adding the possibility of choosing a spokesperson or letting “assistants” step up etc can also make sure participants have a way to voice their opinion regardless of their social skills.

## Remove financial obstacles

An ambitious, international political simulation will incur costs and a participation fee may be necessary to cover them. But even a small-scale, local political simulation can have hidden costs: how much will a participant need to spend if he/she needs to take a bus round trip two consecutive days, add lunch, drinks and such? Will it prevent some participants to join?

Keeping such costs as close to zero is the best alternative: whether they are financially fragile or not, young people's budget is usually limited anyway, and paying to join an activity about politics on a voluntary basis will rarely be on top of their priorities when budgeting, excluding many potential participants.

No miracle recipe here unfortunately, but solutions are there nonetheless! On the one hand, keep costs as low as possible by using all available opportunities: local, regional and national public institutions are actually very often super happy to lend their premises for free for such occasions! Just ask. In addition, the list of public and private funds focusing on civic/political



education is ever growing, consider applying to be in capacity of making your even entirely free and even offer grants to participants who may need them! All countries have their own funds and private foundations to consider, and at the EU scale, Erasmus+ , the Europe for Citizens programme or even the EU Solidarity Corps (if youth-led, your simulation is eligible to “Youth Initiatives” small grants) are waiting for you.



## 3 | A COVID-FREE CASE STUDY ...

### ... OR HOW TO SET UP AN INCLUSIVE SIMULATION IN A PANDEMIC-FREE WORLD

In this part, you will find concrete examples of how the YES Forum designed its previous simulations of the European Parliament with inclusiveness and accessibility in mind first and foremost, to address its own target group’s specific needs.

However Europe3E, the Erasmus+ project which allowed for the creation of this guide, started in late 2019. Therefore it originally planned a political simulation design adapted for a pre-Covid-19 world, allowing the gathering of large groups, closer contact with participants for their support and such pre-2020 features. This original design was born from previous experiments by the YES Forum which showed the efficiency of the principles applied for inclusion and accessibility.

Indeed, because this design was previously successful in opening YES Forum’s simulations to participants regardless of their background, this part will explain what should have been: this YES Forum’s recipe for an inclusive political simulation can provide inspiration to organisers who can set-up their own simulation with no or little interference from Covid-19 restrictions, or who will read this guide when the sky is clear, in a few years.

The next and final part of this guide will, on the other hand, focus on showing how this original design was adjusted after the Covid-19 outbreak, to allow the organisation of a political simulation in the context of ever-changing Covid-19 restrictions while staying true to its original purpose: inclusion and accessibility.

## 1 | Turning reality into a simulation’s basic structure

Before even thinking about specific ways to tackle obstacles young people can face to participate in a political simulation, it is necessary to come up with a basic design: how the simulation will unfold, what will its basic structure and steps be?

When designing this basic political simulation design, YES Forum remains attentive to inclusion and accessibility however through a careful reflection on the three following main aspects.

### Educational purpose: setting clear goals

Setting clear learning goals is the first step, as these will also be adjusted to the target group of such an initiative.

In the case of the YES Forum and its network, all activities are designed to be open to underprivileged youth. Simulating the European Parliament for YES Forum and its members therefore serves, to sum it up, three main purposes:

- **EU Awareness & Political education** more generally: young disadvantaged people have less opportunities to learn how politics work, what impact it has on their daily life, why it matters to be active citizens. YES Forum’s political simulations therefore aim to empower young participants in that regard by offering them the space and framework to reflect about these topics.
- **Intercultural exchange**: the disadvantaged profile of YES Forum’s target group also means most participants have few or no opportunities to get in contact with different cultures, often because they have never had the chance to travel abroad, or to study in higher education where Erasmus+ ensures all students get a chance for intercultural exchanges. YES Forum’s political simulations therefore focus, besides the previous aspect, on bringing participants from different cultural backgrounds together to exchange about their diverse viewpoints through a playful challenge.
- **Participants’ self-development**: for most of YES Forum’s participants, a political simulation is also a rare opportunity to improve a wide array of soft skills, such as the behavioural and affective outcomes detailed in the first part.

These clear goals serve as a compass to navigate the following aspects when turning the reality of how the European Parliament works into a political roleplay game.

## Content vs. Process

A political simulation game can teach many things and skills, and the most ambitious of them – such as international simulations of the United Nations or European Union as a whole – cover two main layers of learning outcomes:

- **Content:** Roleplay is used to create a playful atmosphere allowing the participants to explore and exchange each other’s knowledge on the selected topic, improving the learning outcomes through a game format. For instance, participants will learn a lot on climate change – its origins, detailed impact, potential solutions – through a simulation focusing on this issue.
- **Process:** The game mechanics, as they imitate how a political institution works in real life, teach the participants not so much about the issue at hand, but about the broader political framework and its underlying processes. This way, participants know better how politics work at various levels, how democratic principles are turned into concrete political structures etc.

Because of its diverse target group and the resulting educational goals presented above, **YES Forum chooses to focus the learning experience offered by its political simulations on the process** behind politics and not on content, because:

- **No pre-requisite to join:** focusing on the process over the content means participants don’t need any prior knowledge of the debated issue, so that both higher education students with in-depth knowledge on the topic they study and young participants with less expertise can be involved altogether.
- **No pre-selected theme:** it: also allows to give more of a say to participants in the political simulation’s design, like choosing the theme they care the most about as a group.

## Level of complexity

After learning goals and the balance between content and process are clearly set, the challenge remains to turn reality into a game whose rules participants can understand. This is indispensable to guarantee they are able to be fully involved in the political simulation.

Like at any political scale, the European Union in general and European Parliament in particular follow complex procedures to produce law. Even more so at the European Union level, due to the specifics of this supranational entity.

The aim of YES Forum’s political simulation is not to get all participants to grasp the full complexity of how the European Union works, as even a Master’s Degree in European Union affairs is rarely enough. Instead, YES Forum ambitions to cover the main structures of the European Union (e.g. which institutions are involved and how they collaborate with each other) while reflecting on democracy in action.

That is why YES Forum prioritizes simplicity over realism when adjusting the following aspects of its simulations to its target group’s needs.

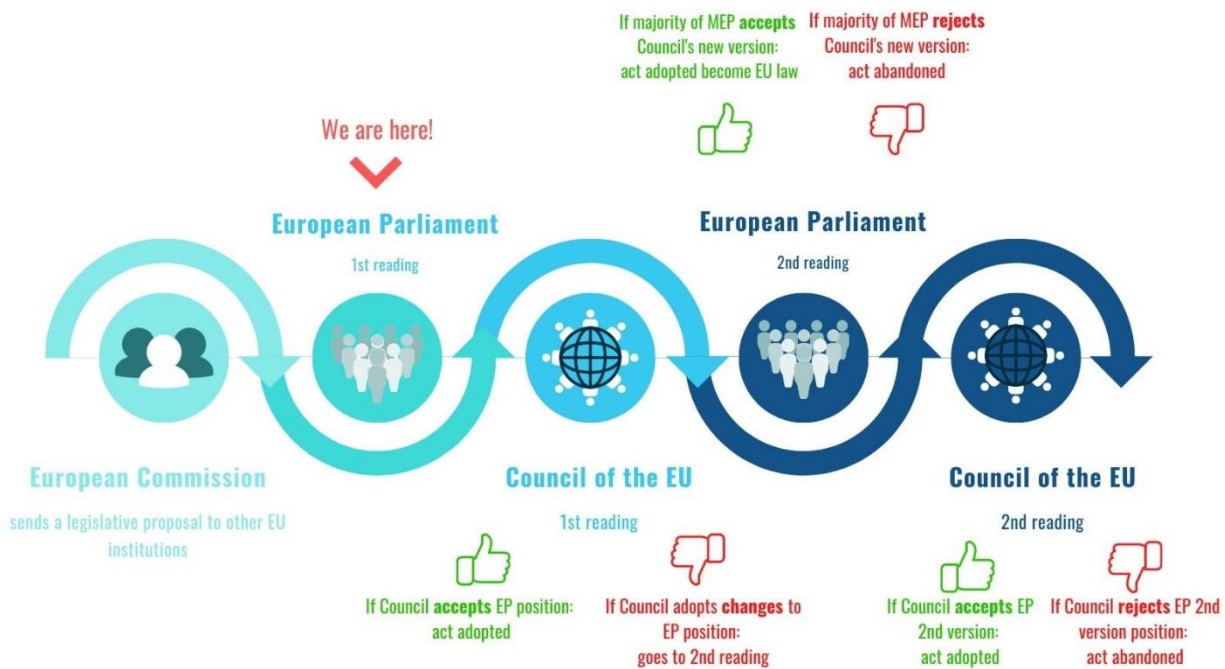


Figure 1: A zoom on which part of the European Union legislative process YES Forum’s participants simulate.

**Scale of the simulation:** In the EU field, political simulations still have a lot of margin on what to actually simulate. The most realistic and therefore complex simulations can encompass all the steps of the ordinary legislative procedure at the EU level ([https://www.europarl.europa.eu/infographic/legislative-procedure/index\\_en.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/infographic/legislative-procedure/index_en.html)): some participants will roleplay the European Commission drafting a text proposal and handing it to the European Parliament (EP), other participants will roleplay Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) negotiating their own amended version of the text proposal in 1<sup>st</sup> reading and sending it to the Council of the EU, and finally other participants will roleplay Member States’ national ministers

in the Council coming up with their own compromise in 1<sup>st</sup> reading, sending it back to the EP for a 2<sup>nd</sup> reading ... and the game can go on until the text proposal is adopted.

Such a degree of realism would hamper YES Forum’s efforts however, and that is why the scope of the simulated process is always narrower: as displayed in the above diagram, YES Forum’s political games only simulate the first reading by the European Parliament. This narrower focus allows for a simpler process, easier to understand for participants because it shares more similarities with how a parliament works at the national level, and allowing to focus the learning process on democracy in action at the EU level while still hinting at the broader picture.

**Roles:** Even with such a limited scope, participants could play many, many roles. The most ambitious simulations indeed include not only MEPs, but also representatives of the other EU institutions: EU Commissioners defending their text proposal in front of the European Parliament, national ministers in the Council of the EU observing parliamentary debates, the little-known Council of Regions and European Economic & Social Committee presenting their opinion on the text proposal, interpreters reflecting the EU’s multilingualism, jurists keeping MEPs on legal tracks, MEPs’ assistants representing the “shadow workers”, lobbyists, journalists, citizens themselves ... the list goes on and can literally include the Dalai Lama depending on the topic.

YES Forum, also to simplify its simulation’s process and thus make it more intelligible to participants regardless of their familiarity with EU politics, keeps three main categories of roles only:

- Members of the European Parliament: they are of course indispensable to simulate how the European Parliament works as they are the elected officials at the core of this legislative work.
- Journalists: while adding diversity to roles and providing a role more adapted to participants with specific needs (e.g. social anxiety making it hard to engage in group discussions), having journalists among the participants is a way to invite all of them to reflect on the role of the press, and the media in all their diversity, in modern democracies.
- Lobbyists: including them allows to show how the civil society in all its diversity can be involved in the legislative process through advocacy work, while inviting participants to reflect on lobbying and, in particular, to nuance the widespread “evil lobbying” cliché.

**Political Groups:** A limited number of political groups in YES Forum’s simulations not only makes these easier to engage with, but also more relatable for all participants who, through national politics, are usually familiar with the traditional left/right political divide.

That is why the YES Forum simply keeps a right-wing and a left-wing political group, as well as a third “deal maker”, either a centrist or a green political group. This latest choice depends on the topic of the simulation: it is easier for participants to picture their new role’s opinion on certain issues as Green MEPs – e.g. any debate on climate change – or Centrist MEPs – e.g. debates more focused on individual freedoms.

**Simulation’s steps:** With these basic elements in place, reality is then broken down into a few phases only, keeping the essential steps. In the case of YES Forum’s political simulations, the exact number of steps actually depends on how much time is available for the simulation, but they usually revolve around these three main phases:

- Political Groups’ Session: this step is great for a progressive start relying on smaller working groups, as participants band together depending on their role. MEPs gather with their colleagues from the same political group to define their position on the simulation’s topic, lobbyists build a strategy to influence MEPs later on, and journalists can start observing other participants while thinking of their favourite way of reporting about it.
- Parliamentary Committee Session: with at least two topics to debate during the simulation, participants can split into Parliamentary Committees specialized on one or the other, and lead lengthy debates separately, while opening the floor to lobbyists who are invited to share their expertise.
- Plenary Session: finally, all participants can gather for the final debates and votes, the most symbolic yet engaging part of a good simulation, as each vote can bring unbearable suspense!

## 2| Making this EP simulation accessible to our target group’s needs

Now that we’ve got a nice overall design for a political simulation of the European Parliament, how can we make sure there are no barriers for young people’s participation regardless of their personal background, difficulties and such?

Below are concrete examples of how the set of basic principles for inclusion in political simulations presented in the second part has been applied by the YES Forum over the past few years. Use these as they are, or as inspiration, there are many other ways to tweak a simulation’s design towards more accessibility for all youth!

When available, these concrete examples will also be illustrated with visuals, documents and any relevant material from these political simulations.

## Identifying our target group’s needs

Overall plans and activities have to be adapted to YES Forum’s target group, “young people with fewer opportunities” in all their diversity. The first step is to get a general feeling of what these “fewer opportunities” would mean for future young participants, in order to anticipate on some of their needs and plan adapted opportunities to further adapt to their needs and expectations.

As YES Forum collaborates with its member organisations for its projects, these partners are in charge of identifying their target group’s specific needs and communicate them to the YES Forum. With a diverse membership, the result is usually a very diverse mix of young people, the “fewer opportunities” to consider depending on each partner’s core activities:

- Young people from rural areas are always represented, from the far reaches of Northern Sweden to the Romanian countryside. The distance from urban centres has common meanings in terms of „youth struggles“ for different partners, with variations in intensity though: higher unemployment, a more difficult access to culture, leisure activities etc, lacking public infrastructure in terms of transport especially etc.
- Young people from deprived suburbs, in particular the French „banlieues“, experiencing many co-dependent exclusion factors such as poverty, unemployment, discrimination (stigma of living in poor areas, often with a migrant’s background too), lack of public infrastructure ...
- Young people with a migrant background
- Long-term unemployed youngsters
- Young people with social difficulties (social anxiety, shyness etc.)
- Educational difficulties (drop outs etc.)
- Health issues



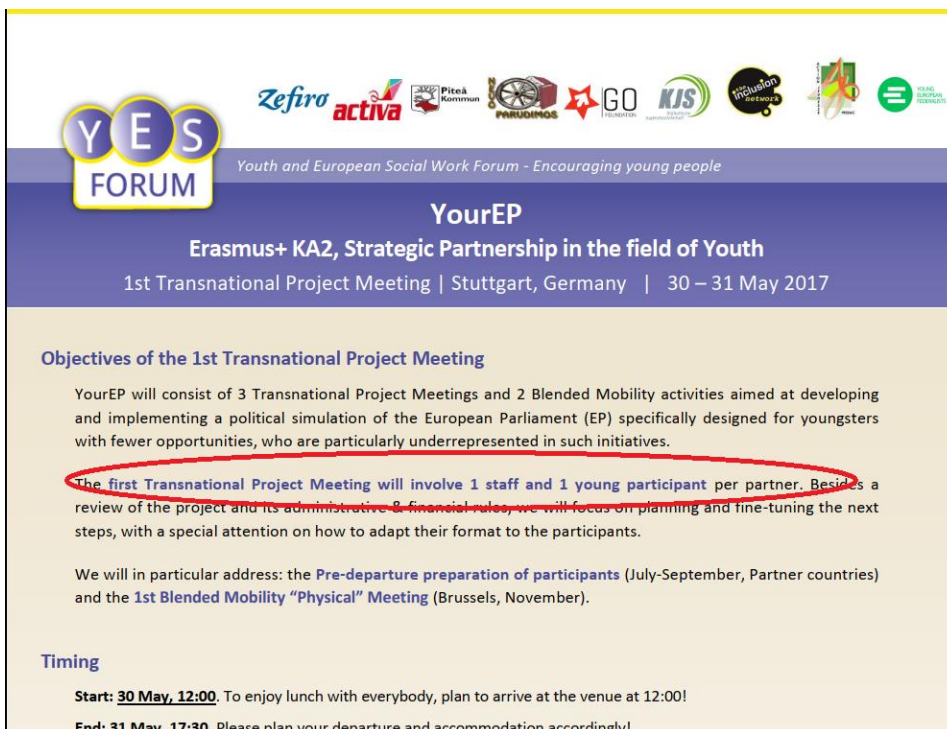
Despite these various obstacles, all meaningful when it comes to joining a political simulation, YES Forum’s political simulations manage to involve all participants in their activities and their evaluations reported a high level of general satisfaction from the young participants.

So now, here are the tricks that are implemented to get to these results!

## Participatory design – give a say to participants

To make sure the entire process, and especially the implemented political simulations, are adapted to their interests and needs, young participants are involved in all steps of YES Forum’s initiatives in that field.

Project Management itself gives space to young participants in decision-making: Transnational Partners Meetings, for instance, gather 1 young participant and 1 staff per partner (cf. Figure 2). Kick-off meetings, for example, decide on diverse aspects of such projects and receive direct input from young people representing their peers from the partners: in the case of YES Forum’s simulations, it results in a greater diversity of methods to learn about the European Union before an actual simulation, and a stronger focus on considering linguistic needs and diverse English skills throughout the entire process.



**YES FORUM**  
Youth and European Social Work Forum - Encouraging young people

**YourEP**  
Erasmus+ KA2, Strategic Partnership in the field of Youth  
1st Transnational Project Meeting | Stuttgart, Germany | 30 – 31 May 2017

**Objectives of the 1st Transnational Project Meeting**

YourEP will consist of 3 Transnational Project Meetings and 2 Blended Mobility activities aimed at developing and implementing a political simulation of the European Parliament (EP) specifically designed for youngsters with fewer opportunities, who are particularly underrepresented in such initiatives.

**The first Transnational Project Meeting will involve 1 staff and 1 young participant per partner.** Besides a review of the project and its administrative & financial rules, we will focus on planning and fine-tuning the next steps, with a special attention on how to adapt their format to the participants.

We will in particular address: the **Pre-departure preparation of participants** (July-September, Partner countries) and the **1st Blended Mobility “Physical” Meeting** (Brussels, November).

**Timing**

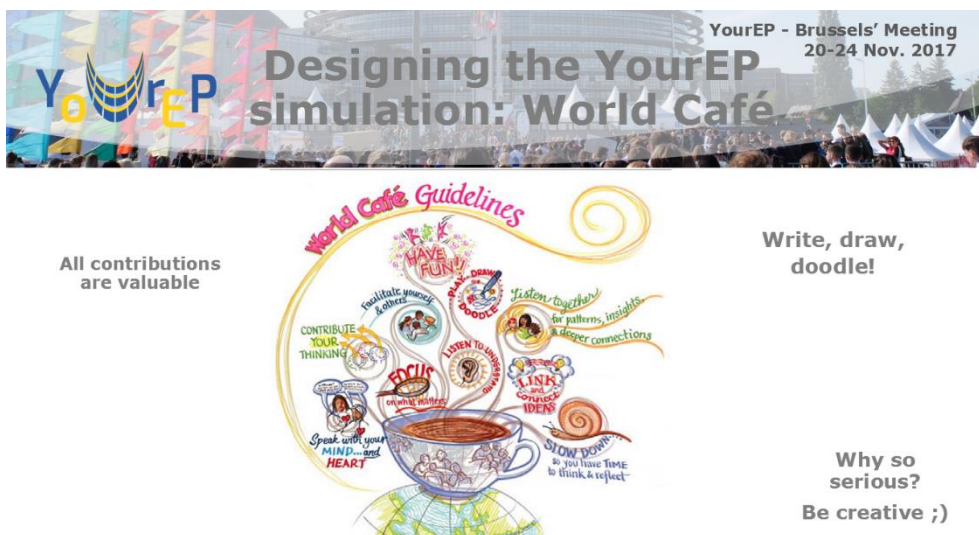
**Start: 30 May, 12:00.** To enjoy lunch with everybody, plan to arrive at the venue at 12:00!

**End: 31 May, 17:30.** Please plan your departure and accommodation accordingly!

Figure 2: The typical invitation to YES Forum’s Partners Meetings, involving staff and young people on an equal footing.

Designing political simulations’ details also uses direct input from the young participants themselves, through various methods:

- A preliminary international meeting with all participants including workshops to brainstorm and decide on several aspects of political simulations: for instance, a World Café (cf. Figure 3) can let participants suggest ideas for the topics they want to discuss in a simulation, or the roles they want to embody, or even the dress-code they want to implement ... or not!
- YES Forum, through its latest Europe3E project especially, used a method called Photovoice to identify the main areas of interest of the participants through an accessible way. Photovoice indeed combines a creative and accessible tool, photography, with a well-established process to help a group exploring issues of common interest. This helped all participants contribute to the selection of themes and detailed topic for their future political simulation (cf. Figures 12 and 13 on page 41). For more information on the use of Photovoice, please check all of Europe3E results here: [www.yes-forum.eu/projects](http://www.yes-forum.eu/projects)
- A Facebook group gathers all participants and uses online polls to take final decisions based on the suggestions gathered in earlier steps through a democratic process. The nature of the topics to address and the precise topics themselves are chosen this way for instance (cf. Figure 4).





**Designing the YourEP simulation: World Café**

Round 1

**What to TALK about during the simulation?**

What themes, topics, issues do you want to discuss, debate? A real EU law, your own creation?

What will be the objective of the text adopted by the simulation?

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*Figure 3: Extracts from the Powerpoint used in the context of a World Café focusing on exchanging ideas for diverse aspects of the political simulations with young participants.*

As a result:

- YES Forum’s political simulations take into account young participants’ wishes and needs from the very beginning and throughout the entire process of designing them, gradually adapting activities thanks to participants’ direct input;
- They also promote the young participants’ ownership of such projects, and in turn their motivation to be involved. This is especially meaningful to motivate young people with a strong disillusionment – from distrust to plain hate – of politics, resulting from a sense of abandonment (in deprived suburbs and rural areas especially).

## Europe3E | “Europe through young Eyes: Exchange, Explore, Exhibit”

Groupe Privé · 26 membres

+ Inviter

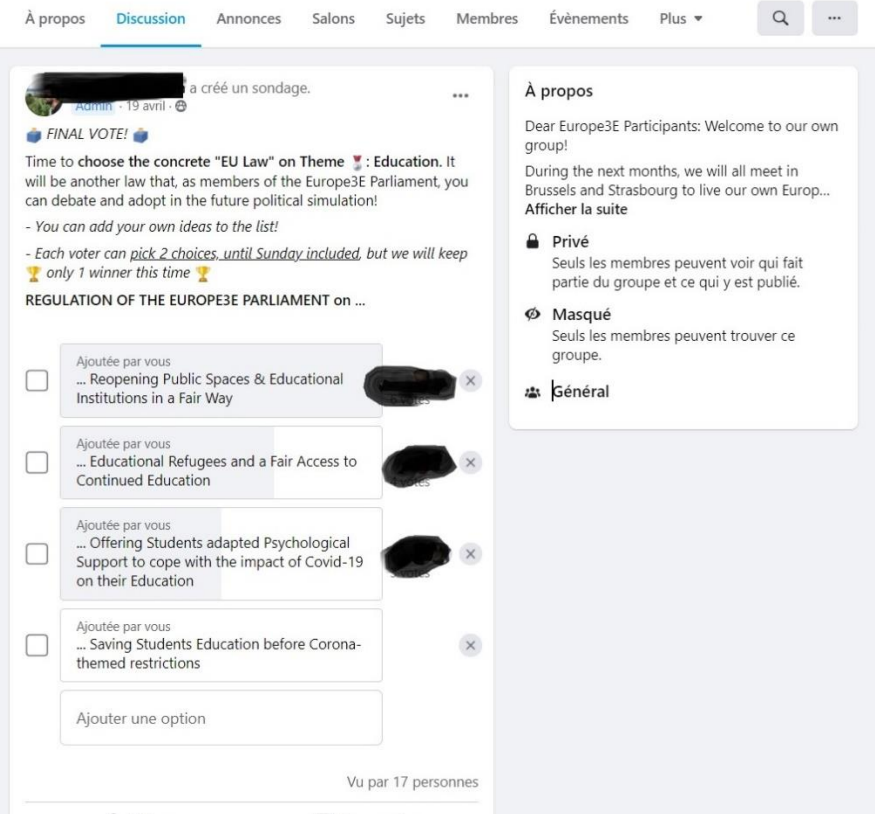


Figure 4: An example of one of the online polls used to let participants decide on the simulations’ aspects whenever there was room for it (very professionally anonymised).

### Ongoing Support

One of the YES Forum’s assets is its member organisations’ expertise in youth & social work. In our political simulations, these skills also come in handy.

Reaching out to youth in all its diversity, and more specifically attracting said diversity into a political simulation, is a challenge for any organiser. Fortunately, YES Forum members can already rely on their daily youth and social work to invite young people into political simulations. This outreach work makes sure a great diversity of young people hear about the opportunity and receive explanations and encouragement from youth workers. That way, participants include a lot of young people who would probably not hear of or consider joining a political simulation, instead of a homogeneous group of youngsters already interested in and knowledgeable of politics.

After this outreach work, YES Forum partners in a political simulation support their own young participants in the various stages of the project, in order to cater for all their needs and adapt to their personal difficulties. For instance, before political simulations themselves, partners organise local meetings with their participants at the local level: they organise activities adapted to their smaller groups’ needs, for example focusing on getting basic knowledge about politics for groups who don’t feel confident about it at the beginning (e.g. visiting their town hall, national parliament, debating current trends, doing street interviews), building the participants’ self-confidence (e.g. preparing to talk in front of an audience, building trust within the group, or “training” before the actual simulation (cf. Figure 5). Thanks to the flexibility offered by such local meetings, the methods themselves are also adapted to participants.

Partners’ staff are even involved as participants in YES Forum’s political simulations to help their young participants “from the inside” ... and learn as well! To make sure young participants can also participate on an equal footing regardless of their English skills, some partners also involve interpreters, or help their participants through the staff involved in the simulation itself.


Europe3E Small Simulation of the European Parliament  
Bilateral exchanges, June-August 2021

## “Whoooo are you? Who who? Who who?”

Whether you are going to be a MEP, a Lobbyist or a Journalist, it is important to picture your new “Europe3E Identity” to slip into your new shoes!

**Step 1: Guiding Questions**

Easy enough: Just use the questions on the following page to imagine who you are going to roleplay!  
Get help from the youth worker accompanying you or the other participants, it will be easier as a group.

**Step 2: Creative Presentation**

Are you done yet? This was just an appetizer!

New mission, before the next step: **Preparing to present your role through a creative method** of your choice. MEPs should also prepare to present their **Political Groups!** These few ideas can help you:

- 📄 A **Campaign Poster** promoting yourself (or your Political Group, for MEPs) with a few keywords illustrating your new role. It can easily work for MEPs and Lobbyists.  
Not an expert drawer or graphic designer? No problem: you can use an easy & free online tool like [Canva](#), or just find the right template and modify it [here!](#) Use your Photovoice skills to take a picture for your poster expressing your role’s political opinions!
- 📺 A short video in which you can have a quick speech presenting your role and ideas. This is perfect for all roles, MEPs, Lobbyists and Journalists. For instance, a journalist can record an interview of a MEP or Lobbyist 🗣️
- 📱 A drawn **Social Media** account for your new role. This is perfect for MEPs since the real ones use Social Media a lot!
- ✍️ For journalists, create your own fake **Newspaper or Magazine’s Cover!** Just imagine one or several headlines presenting the future simulation, add the right illustrations, and that’s it. Many online tools can help you if drawing is not a passion of yours, like these [templates](#).

And some other ideas: A fake Resume, a Blog article, a Flyer, a Business card, improvising a politician’s costume ... Feel free to be creative! 🎭



Figure 5: An example of a template for a preparatory activity before a simulation. Partners use it in local meetings to make it easier for young participants to slip into their new role’s shoes (e.g. doing it in their native tongue, in a small group making it easier to speak in public etc).

## Back to Basics! The Blended Learning Experience

Joining a political simulation can be an intimidating prospect when you don’t know much about politics yet, even though you are interested. To remove this barrier, a strong focus is put on including complementary learning opportunities to allow all young participants, as well as partners’ staff, to take part in YES Forum’ EP simulations regardless of their prior knowledge of the European Union.

This preliminary learning uses a large variety of methods, blending “physical” and online activities to adapt to the individuals’ own learning style.

- As explained above, partners organise local meetings with their smaller groups prior to any political simulation. One of the objective of these local meetings is to fill any “knowledge gap” participants feel would hinder their engagement in the actual simulation. Methods and material are offered to all partners (cf. Figure 6), but in the end each group is free to pick activities in the offered pool of methods or choose different ones: the priority is to focus on the participants’ needs (e.g. which areas, in politics or EU-related fields, they wished to explore) and learning styles (i.e. non formal methods are predominant, but range from preparing and conducting street interviews to visiting local and national political institutions).
- Online activities are offered to complement the partners’ preparation and offer an even more flexible learning platform. So far a hidden Facebook group has been used instead of creating a whole new platform. As most of participants already use Facebook on a daily basis, it remains the most accessible online tool to let everybody engage with each other. It is used to:
  - o Share accessible, adapted learning material. We make use of the many great resources available online, such as EuroparITV (now the “European Parliament’s Multimedia Center”, [multimedia.europarl.europa.eu](http://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu)) short, educational and subtitled videos or quizzes (cf. Figure 7). Online games and quizzes also make for fun learning opportunities. Memes as well have a lot to teach!
  - o Get to know each other, and discuss topics of common interests, besides the design and preparation of the political simulation themselves.
- In addition, an international meeting is usually organised a few months before the actual simulations. Such meetings gather all participants to conclude a preparatory learning phase in the heart of Europe itself, Brussels, still with a variety of non-formal methods (cf. Figure 8).



## Guidelines

### Blended Mobility C1 – Pre-departure Preparation

March-June 2020 | Local Activities, Partner countries

As an E3E partner, the next few months will be focused on finishing the recruitment of your young participants and preparing them before our training in Brussels in June.

#### Local Preparations

Each partner will be responsible for this preparation by organising or taking part in local activities with its young participants. Reminders:

- Each partner must organise at least 1 local meeting with its participants, more are possible;
- Local activities can be part of the partner’s daily activities if relevant;
- Local activities can include a wider group than the E3E participants (e.g. partner’s target group)
- Each local activity must be [reported to the YES Forum with this template](#).

The activities should aim at:

1. Fostering good conditions for the rest of the project (Page 2)
2. Getting participants acquainted with politics (Page 7)
3. Introducing participants to photography (Page 14)

To achieve these goals, you will find below a list of ideas, links and even some contacts! Two activities are mandatory (see p. 2), all others are suggestions: we trust you to adapt to your participants’ profiles, needs etc!



Speech Impro	
Duration	30 min to 1H, depending on group size
Group Size	2 to 20
Material	Optional: Paper and pens to take some improvised notes
Objectives	
Building participants’ self-confidence before joining – and talking in front of – a whole international group; Preparing them to roleplay as politicians later on.	
Step-by-step Method	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The group is given a not very serious theme/question: “Cats or dogs?”, “Chocolate should be forbidden”, “A eulogy to your favourite candies” ...</li> <li>- Participants have a moment to improvise a personal and short speech. The shorter the preparation is, the more challenging – but funny – the results!</li> <li>- Each participant gives his/her speech in front of the others.</li> <li>- Several rounds can be organised with different questions/themes.</li> <li>- Debriefing: Rather optional, but you can discuss with participants what helped them, or could have (e.g. just writing keywords on a post-it beforehand, thinking of a charismatic politician/star etc).</li> </ul>	
Variant: “Debate battle” with funny topics, if participants each have to defend a different opinion.	
Remarks	
The activity can easily involve a wider audience than the project’s participants.	
If that works well, the activity can be made more challenging and/or competitive by:	

Figure 6: Extracts from Guidelines shared with all partners to support their local preparations with young participants, offering a pool of methods to prepare on diverse aspects (“Fostering good conditions for the entire project”, “Learning the basics about politics”, “Discovering the EU”)

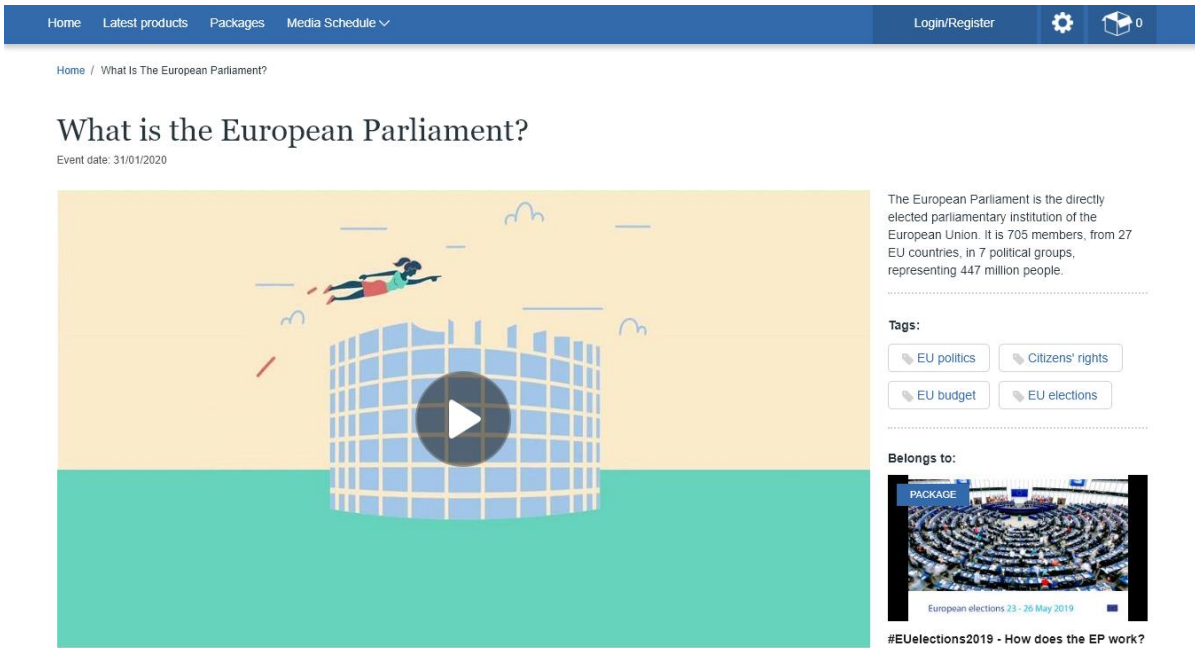


Figure 7: An example of a 2 to 3min video clip developed by the European Parliament and available online, dubbed and subbed in all 24 official EU languages, in a simple and accessible – and catchy! – format. Check [multimedia.europarl.europa.eu](https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu)



Figure 8: Among the methods used to learn about EU politics first, the perfect board game, “Legislativity”! Check it on <https://europa-zentrum.de/projekte/legislativity-das-spiel-zur-eu-gesetzgebung/>



## Learning the fun way!

Roleplaying in itself can be a fun, playful experience. Roleplaying politics is not as sexy as some D&D though. That is why following young participants’ suggestions, YES Forum political simulations usually include other creative features to make them even more entertaining.

For instance after a vote by young participants, it was decided to debate two different proposals during one of these simulations. One was realistic (“Resolution on True Equality in High School”) and the other one not so realistic ... and quite fun! (“Regulation on the Protection of European Fantastic Creatures”). Though unrealistic on paper, this proposal actually led to funny yet deep debates about how to protect endangered species in real life! (cf. Figure 9)

As mentioned above, learning methods also include a large majority of non-formal methods: all kinds of games, youth activities, and even board games! (cf. Figure 8)

This “entertaining extra-layer” is an asset in several regards when it comes to inclusion, as it:

- Makes a simulation more attractive and enjoyable even for young people who are not interested in the EU at first, or sceptical about the experience (e.g. because they distrust politics altogether for instance)
- Helps participants focusing on the democratic legislative process: with a funny topic, they can be creative and rely on their imagination to take part in debates, without needing any expertise on specific, sometimes technical issues!
- Introduces participants to real-life issues through a fun shortcut, as a parallel can easily be made between such an unrealistic and fun topic and real-life issues!



Strasbourg, 31.05.18

Proposal for a  
REGULATION OF THE YOUR EP EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL  
**on the Protection of the European Fantastic Creatures**

*As adopted by the YourEP European Parliament on 1<sup>st</sup> Reading on 31.05.18*

*In favour: 21 votes*

*Against: 0 votes*

*Abstention: 1 vote*

*Because:*

(A) Climate change and overexploitation of Europe's magical resources have a dramatic impact on our fantastic wildlife. Many legendary creatures are now being threatened with extinction, for instance because of hunting.

(B) The biodiversity of Europe's fantastic ecosystems must be protected as Europe depends on these ecosystems for its Mana production. Mana is the magical energy sustaining the world.

*The YourEP European Union decides:*

(1) This text covers **all fantastic creatures. Fantastic creatures are defined by their mana production and magic powers.**

(2) EU Member States are required to create Magic Protection Areas covering 25% to 75% of their territory, depending on Member States .

(3) Hunting and fishing is forbidden in the Magic Protection Areas.

(4.1) **Outside of Magical Protection Areas, hunting is allowed in a given year when the population density is increased by more than 15%. Otherwise, hunting and fishing can be forbidden for a year or less to let the population grow.**

Figure 9: The "Proposal for a Regulation on the Protection of European Fantastic Creatures" as debated, amended and adopted by one of the political simulations! Unicorns were fortunately safeguarded in Magical Protection Areas, even though witches can still hunt them under certain conditions and quotas to protect their trade.

## Chill out! Keeping it simple

Early on in its first political simulation, YES Forum’s young participants decided to avoid reproducing the formal social norms often prevailing in politics. For instance, there was no dress code for the simulation itself, and participants didn’t have to use typical ceremonial greetings to address each other (e.g. “Honourable Members, dear friends and colleagues”). Such a chill, non-formal atmosphere has been constantly favoured since then in other simulations.

On the one hand, it avoids creating “symbolic” obstacles by forcing participants to mimic formal behaviours they are not comfortable with, or distrustful of. On the other hand, it also helps focusing on the legislative process itself by overlooking its most formal, ceremonial and yet not-so-indispensable aspects.



*Figure 10: Flip flops and baseball cap instead of a suit and a bow tie work very well too? Believe it or not, this smiling face was a very involved MEP!*

## Flexibility is the key! The many ways of participating

To cater for all participants’ needs and personal difficulties, YES Forum’s simulations remain flexible in many aspects.

They rely on several progressive sessions – basically Political Groups, Committees, and a final Plenary session – like any simulation of the European Parliament, but their timeframe keeps a margin which always proves useful: to take time to accommodate the specific needs of young participants (e.g. adding extra breaks when needed), but also because in the end, some participants want to debate longer than planned!

Moreover, group discussions are a key component of political simulations. However – just like in real politics – YES Forum makes sure to offer alternative ways of participating to ensure all participants, even if they are facing social or interpersonal difficulties, can engage in its simulations (cf. Figure 11). For instance:

- Space for individual reflection: simulations plan specific times to let participants reflect by themselves, and for instance write their own amendments to be proposed to the other participants later on.
- Informal times: Any legislative process revolves around key, unavoidable official steps involving group discussions. But in between, there is also a lot of work! During informal times (breaks, lunch and dinner, evening drink ...), participants are encouraged to keep roleplaying: participants who are uncomfortable with group discussions can discuss their ideas in one-on-one conversations over a relaxed coffee break.
- Lobbyists & Journalists: These roles, because they involve more “behind the stage” work than for MEPs, offer flexible ways to engage with other participants, beyond group discussions.
- Spokespersons: Young participants can also ask other participants, or the staff supporting them, to act as their “spokesperson” during a simulation, especially during group discussions.



**👍 The many ways of participating 👍**

- **Group Discussions:** Raise your voice! (MEPs)
- **Hire a Spokesperson** if you're not comfortable with public speaking! (MEPs)
- Submit **Written Questions** to your Group President (MEPs)
- **Make the best of Breaks:** Discuss alone with another person to convince him/her of your position, imagine a future compromise, get information (MEPs/Lobbyists/Journalists)
- **Reflect individually** on your objectives/strategy (Lobbyists/Journalists)
- **Listen to the Groups' discussions** to identify allies/opponents (Lobbyists) and get the information you need (Lobbyists/Journalists)
- **Be Creative! Find powerful/original tools** to do your job! (Lobbyists/Journalists)

 @YourEPsimulation | #YourEPsimulation  @YESForumoffice  Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

Figure 11: Screenshot of a slide of the Powerpoint used to introduce one of the political simulations. It made the “many ways of participating” explicit, to make sure participants were not blocked from participating because of their different social ease for instance.

## A free opportunity

Finally, YES Forum’s simulations are entirely free for young participants thanks to Erasmus+ funds. This allows all costs are covered: participants don’t have to personally pay for their trips, accommodation or food and can therefore get involved regardless of their financial situation. Financial support to all partners also helps them dedicating enough time to support their young participants.

A lot of other public funds are available! Political simulations, especially with the new Erasmus+ programme (2021-2027), have a privileged position to access such funds.

In addition, co-funding from other sources is sought to make sure both participants and partners are not financially endangered at any time (e.g. accommodation can be very expensive in Strasbourg and Brussels sometimes). Members of the European Parliament themselves are very often happy to sponsor such political simulations.



## 4 | A COVID-FRIENDLY CASE STUDY ...

### ... OR HOW TO ADAPT TO COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS WITHOUT SACRIFICING ACCESSIBILITY

As explained above, Europe3E, the Erasmus+ project which led to the creation of this guide started in late 2019.

The objective was to lead a final “crash-test” of the YES Forum method for inclusive and accessible political simulations, make final adjustments to it, and present the whole recipe in this guide. While this ultimate fine-tuning was not possible as originally planned due to the Covid-19 outbreak and its chaotic management across Europe since then, the previous part explains what should have been based on earlier YES Forum experiments which proved the efficiency of its recipe.

However, the Europe3E project had to take an unexpected turn like most international projects in 2020-2021. The Covid-19 outbreak made these original plans, well-adjusted and efficient in “normal times”, totally unrealistic in regard to ever-changing Covid-19 restrictions, both at the local, national and European levels.

In this context, making YES Forum’s work inclusive and accessible first and foremost meant something much simpler: making it happening. To help other organisers facing similar

difficulties, this part will explain how the YES Forum adapted its original plans to fit Covid-19 restrictions and more generally a uncertain context while achieving a rather tricky challenge: remaining inclusive and accessible.

## 1 | To be or not to be (online)

Although technically possible, it was decided early on to avoid keeping the exact same simulation design while only adapting it to online collaboration tools.

Online activities have indeed a great, undeniable educational potential but YES Forum’s experience with and beyond political simulations has systematically shown they can, on the contrary, become an exclusion factor for YES Forum’s diverse and disadvantaged target group. Online formats work well with certain homogeneous groups (e.g. higher education students already used to online collaboration tools through their studies long before the Covid-19 outbreak), they are however no miracle solution and can on the contrary become an exclusion factor when working with broader groups, including young people with fewer opportunities.

Among many other factors making online tools a double-edged sword for YES Forum’s work are the fact that:

- Disadvantaged young people do not always have a personal laptop to comfortably take part in an online meeting at home, or even personal space at home to do so;
- Not all young people are digital experts despite clichés in that regard: many don’t have the digital skills sufficient to focus on the content of online activities rather than their technical aspects;
- Young people who have not been used to online collaboration in a familiar setting such as school are rarely comfortable with speaking to a group of total strangers through a screen while being alone at home.
- More generally, vulnerable groups need personal support which can only be provided in person to feel at ease before joining an international event (e.g. trust building within the group, developing confidence and self-esteem).

That is why, while acknowledging online solutions are unavoidable up to a certain extent, YES Forum attempted to avoid them for young participants as much as possible and explored the alternative solutions detailed below.





## 2 | A flexible framework

YES Forum’s original plans for the Europe3E project were designed to carry out political simulation of the European Parliament in one main sitting, gathering a group of 30-40 participants together in a transnational meeting. Project partners could have, in such a framework, focused on recruiting and preparing young participants while leaving the general organisation to the YES Forum as project coordinator.

Naturally, these plans did not survive early 2020. After a fully online version of the exact same plans was deemed counter-productive by the partnership due to the above-mentioned reasons, many imaginative scenarios were explored.

Among alternative plans whose names almost exhausted the entire alphabet (cf. Figure 14), the final options included:

- Bilateral exchanges, instead of an international meeting gathering all partners and participants for a big political simulation, allowed project partners and their young participants to meet in pairs and play the Europe3E political simulation in a much smaller context, with a dozen participants at most. A smaller setting was indeed much more adapted to Covid-19 restrictions, while still offering participants the chance to go abroad, what many had never done beforehand. This option remained ambitious in the context of ever-changing Covid-19 restrictions, which made the planning of a trip abroad risky even a few days before the planned departure. That is why only one bilateral exchange happened in the end: most partners were still not able to travel, some even had to cancel a planned trip at the last minute due to new, unexpected restrictions.
- Local simulations: partners who could not travel with their young participants, most of them in the end actually, were provided the tools necessary to carry out an even simpler and smaller version of the political simulation at home, with only local participants. The intercultural exchange relied on the comparison of the groups’ results afterward.

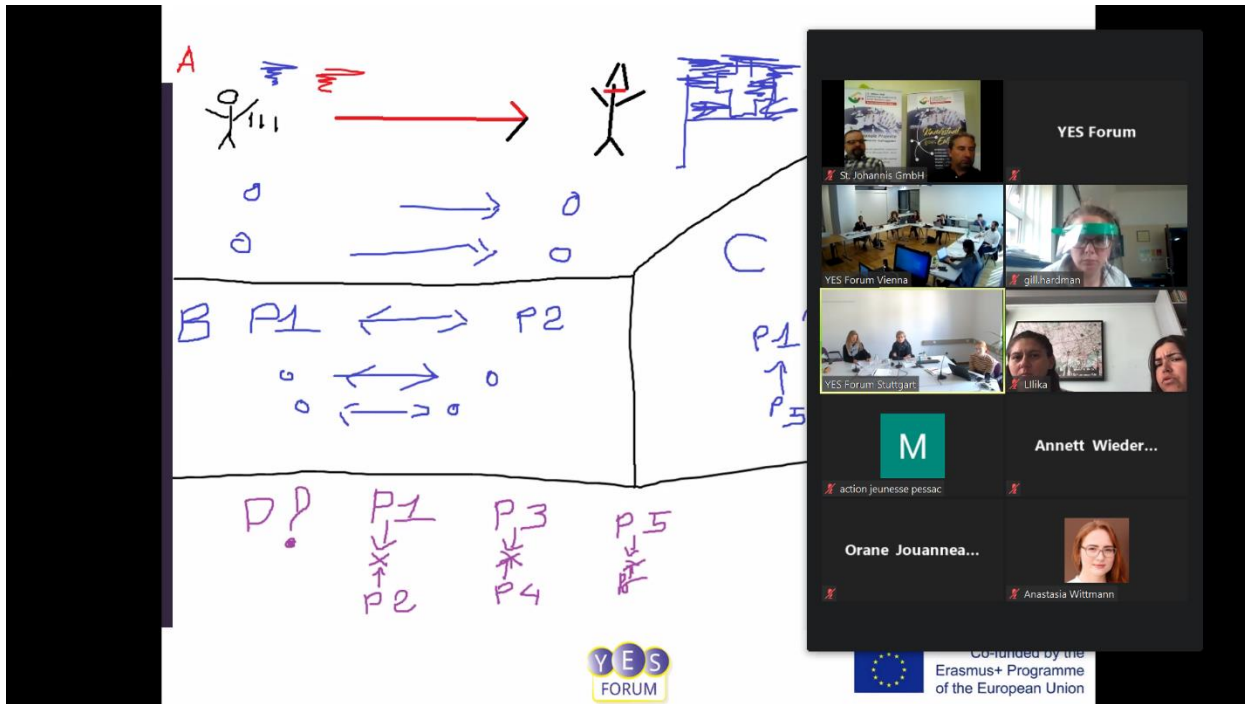


Figure 14: Lock-downs kept half of Europe at home throughout the majority of Europe3E’s duration, leading to hybrid partner meetings and ... talented brainstorming in search of alternative plans. Imagine what plans E and beyond looked like.

### 3 | A minimalistic and adaptive simulation design

The original layout of the Europe3E political simulation radically changed to answer new requirements, especially the need for a design:

- Adapted to very small groups (in case of a local simulation with few participants) but flexible enough to involve a slightly bigger group if needed (in case of a bilateral exchange between two partners);
- Requiring minimal preparation from both facilitators and participants, to avoid asking partners and young people to spend a lot of time preparing for an activity with a high risk of being cancelled;
- That can be led by a facilitator with no prior experience with political simulations, so that staff from partner organisations with little or no expertise on EU matters could still facilitate the activity themselves if YES Forum professional facilitators could not travel to a bilateral or local simulation to provide support.
- Avoiding as much as possible to rely on online tools to avoid creating a divide among young participants depending on their digital proficiency.

Eventually, the resulting political simulation was a minimalistic and even more flexible version of the original design. The main structure remained similar (i.e. Roles, Political Groups, scope of the simulation, as laid out in the third part) but was entirely turned into the following “board game-like” set of printable material to make its use as easy and straightforward as possible in any context.

This “Europe3E Small Simulation Pack” was indeed designed in such a way that facilitator and participants only have to go through a few pages of introduction to understand the simulation’s overall context, then print the following material and simply follow the instructions!

- **Instructions:** Step-by-step instructions to follow during the simulation itself, all laid out on one page only and fitting in a half-day! (cf. Figure 15)
- **Text Proposals:** Two draft “EU laws” participants could discuss, modify and adopt, with various features making it easier for participants to handle, such as a very limited number of articles and highlighted parts corresponding to the elements that can most easily be adjusted in negotiations (cf. Figure 16).
- **Role Cards:** A set of cards presenting each available role through some basic hints that participants from all over Europe can relate to thanks to familiarity with national politics (cf. Figure 17).
- **“Whoooo are you?”:** A document helping participants stepping into new shoes through guiding questions and tips on how to creatively embody their new role.
- **Amendment Proposals:** Templates to make it as easy as possible for participants to suggest modifications to the Text Proposals.



## Europe3E Small Simulation - Instructions

This game is a short simulation of political negotiations in the European Parliament. You should first:

- Prepare participants so that they understand the context of the activity thanks to the full Infokit.
- Print the annexed material: Text Proposals, Role cards, Amendment and “Who are you?” templates.

Afterward, simply follow the basic steps below, breaks included!

### Step 1 – Political Groups’ Session (1H15)

*MEPs are freshly elected, lobbyists just got their job, a journalist has a new topic to cover ... Time to step into new shoes!*

1. Picking Roles: distribute Role cards randomly, let participants negotiate or be more creative! (cf. Infokit, p.8)
2. Help participants imagining their new role through the “Who are you?” template and plan a break.

### Step 2 – Parliamentary Committee Meeting (1H45)

*A fraction of MEPs, specialized on the topic, spend more time preparing the ground for the later votes.*

1. Intro: Participants present themselves and Political Groups through their “Who are you?” creative work (15 min)
2. Hearings: Political Groups & Lobbyists present their basic opinion on the proposal. Do they like it? Do they want to change it? How? (15 min)
3. Debate: What does each player think of the others’ general positions? (15 min)
4. Groups’ Break: Political Groups split up and discuss how they want to modify the text. Lobbyists get meetings with them to convince groups separately. MEPs submit Amendment Proposals alone, together with others, or as entire Political Groups (30min)
5. Amendment Presentations: The Committee gathers once again. Each Amendment Proposal is presented by the MEP(s) who wrote it and leads to a short debate. The Committee is done when all have been examined (30 min)

### Step 3 – In the corridors ... Informal negotiations (45min)

*Committee work is done, time for a break ... but debates and negotiations never really end!*

On a break, participants are encouraged to hold informal negotiations. Can they find a majority to vote for their Amendment Proposals? Or build an alliance of MEPs or Political Groups with a new “compromise Amendment”?

*Tip: Set a deadline for the last Amendment Proposals, to have time to sort them for the later votes (cf. Infokit p.10)*

### Step 4 – Plenary Session (45min)

*The day has come, little is left to debate, time for all MEPs to vote the official Europe3E position!*

1. Official Statements: MEPs separately and/or Political Groups altogether express themselves about what they think can be achieved. Lobbyists also express their feelings on the earlier discussions’ results (15 min)
2. Votes: Sorted out (cf. Infokit p.11), Amendment Proposals are voted in turn. The final amended text is adopted – or not?! – through a last vote (20 min)  
*Tip: Use the “Track Changes” feature of Word to visualize the impact of Amendment Proposals before each vote.*
3. Concluding Statements: Everybody is invited to have a final statement. Happy or not? (10 min)



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Figure 15: The final “Covid-friendly” version of the Europe3E simulation aimed at the greatest simplicity. Instructions for the whole simulation covered a single page only!



Brussels, 15.04.21

Proposal for a  
REGULATION OF THE EUROPE3E EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL  
**on Mandatory Climate Lockdowns to reduce CO2  
Worldwide Emissions**

*Because:*

(A) Human activity, through the emission of greenhouse gases, is the main origin of climate change, which is a threat to citizens' wellbeing. Strong efforts are needed to limit climate change and protect citizens.

(B) The lock-down measures used to fight the Covid-19 pandemic have led to a big reduction of CO2 emissions. By reducing human activity, such lock-downs can be a powerful tool to fight climate change.

*The Europe3E European Union decides:*

(1) Each year, Member States must enforce a **“Climate lock-down”** of (a) **8 consecutive weeks** or (b) **10 weeks scattered** throughout the year.

(2) Citizens can **leave home only for** the following **essential services: grocery shopping and urgent medical appointments.**

(3) All businesses are **closed except essential** services. Their **employees must take a 2 weeks individual lock-down another time** in the year.

(4) A **new Climate Police** can check **citizens at home with no prior notice.**

(5) A **maximum 10€ fine** is applied to citizens who don't respect lock-downs.

(This document is a fake creation for the simulation of the European Parliament „Europe3E“. It is of course not endorsed by the European Commission, European Parliament or any other official institution of the European Union)

Figure 16: The boldest of the Text Proposals Europ3E young participants could negotiate.

 <p><b>Member of the European Parliament</b> MEPs negotiate and vote EU laws. They are split in Political Groups according to their political beliefs.</p>	 <p><b>Member of the European Parliament</b> MEPs negotiate and vote EU laws. They are split in Political Groups according to their political beliefs.</p>	 <p><b>Member of the European Parliament</b> MEPs negotiate and vote EU laws. They are split in Political Groups according to their political beliefs.</p>
<p><b>CONSERVATIVE RIGHT GROUP MEMBER</b></p>	<p><b>EUROPEAN LEFT GROUP MEMBER</b></p>	<p><b>EUROPEAN ECOLOGIST GROUP MEMBER</b></p>
<p>THEY ARE MORE PRO-BUSINESS AND PREFER DEPENDING ON PRIVATE INITIATIVES TO SOLVE ISSUES.</p> <p>THEY ARE STILL OK WITH SOME STATE INTERVENTION AND MARKET REGULATION, INCLUDING TO FIGHT CLIMATE CHANGE.</p> <p>BUT IT IS BETTER TO ENCOURAGE PEOPLE TO BEHAVE IN A GOOD WAY THAN FORCING THEM TO DO SO.</p>	<p>THEY ARE MORE PRO-WORKER AND IN FAVOR OF STATE INTERVENTION WHEN IT IS NECESSARY.</p> <p>EQUALITY AND SOLIDARITY ARE KEY PRIORITIES FOR THEM.</p> <p>ECOLOGY IS IMPORTANT AS WELL. IT NEEDS STRONG POLICIES. BUT NOT WITHOUT CONSIDERING EMPLOYMENT.</p>	<p>THEY ARE COMMITTED TO ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY, INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM, DIVERSITY &amp; SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.</p> <p>THEY ARE FEDERALISTS &amp; WANT A STRONG ENVIRONMENTAL LEGISLATION IN THE EU.</p> <p>NO TIME TO LOSE. RADICAL ACTION IS NEEDED NOW TO AVOID THE WORST OF CLIMATE CHANGE. CITIZENS AND BUSINESS BOTH NEED A STABLE CLIMATE.</p>
 <p>Lobbyists try to influence MEPs. They promote law-making which takes their needs into account.</p>	 <p>Lobbyists try to influence MEPs. They promote law-making which takes their needs into account.</p>	 <p>No way to know what MEPs are doing without you to report about it. Or about who influences them!</p>
<p><b>PRO-ENVIRONMENT LOBBYIST</b></p>	<p><b>PRO-BUSINESS LOBBYIST</b></p>	<p><b>JOURNALIST</b></p>
<p>SUBTLE ACTION WAS NEEDED DECADES AGO. TOO LATE FOR NON-AMBITIOUS ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES NOW. YOU CAN PROVIDE THE SCIENTIFIC DATA SHOWING THEY ARE FAILING ALREADY.</p> <p>A HISTORIC ACTION TO FIGHT CLIMATE CHANGE IS THE ONLY SOLUTION. SHORT-TERM SACRIFICES WILL BRING LONG-TERM BENEFITS. FOR PEOPLE &amp; BUSINESSES ALIKE.</p>	<p>CLIMATE CHANGE CANNOT BE DENIED. BUT ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES WILL DO MORE HARM THAN GOOD IF TOO RADICAL. IF THEY CREATE AN ECONOMIC CRISIS.</p> <p>YOU HAVE ASKED ECONOMISTS TO HELP. THEIR DATA SUGGEST A SAFER WAY: BALANCING THE FIGHT AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE NEED FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH THROUGH SUBTLE POLICIES.</p>	<p>YOU WANT TO GIVE PEOPLE THE INFORMATION THEY NEED SO THAT THEY CAN FORM THEIR OWN OPINION. NOT TO PROMOTE YOURS.</p> <p>IT IS NOT EASY TO REMAIN NEUTRAL. OR TO GET THE INFORMATION SOME PEOPLE WOULD KEEP HIDDEN. BUT YOU HAVE THE SKILLS TO DO SO AND SHARE YOUR INVESTIGATIONS WITH THE WORLD.</p>

Figure 17: The Role Cards used to help participants stepping into their new, roleplayed shoes during the Europe3E simulations of the EP.

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## Disclaimer

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