STUDENT MANIFESTO ON EUROPEAN ANGST

The document you are reading is the result of a collaborative effort of 42 university students – 24 women and 18 men – of whom 20 are EU citizens. It was presented at the conference "European Angst: A conference on populism, extremism and euroscepticism in contemporary European societies", which took place on 6–7 December 2016 in Brussels, Belgium.

I.   The Rapid Decay of the European Dream

How could this happen, who is responsible?

In 2012, Europe's supranational and intergovernmental authority won the coveted Nobel Peace Prize for its role in securing sustained and unifying peace throughout a diverse continent. This peace was attained under a banner of inclusivity and liberal democratic governance amongst former political and economic rivals. We support the promotion of thoughtful measures towards the achievement of peaceful and inclusive European integration.

We want the EU to finally live up to its motto of 'unity in diversity'

The measures currently being taken by Europe's leaders are inadequate and unproductive in this respect, and the youth of the world deserve better.
- We want a strong multinational entity, without borders that separate its citizens, and a union that strives for common goals and thinks beyond national interests.
- We want a European Union that is built on values and ideals such as democracy, freedom, respect for the law and the dignity of every human being, irrespective of where they come from, the colour of their skin, who they love, who they worship, what they consider their gender, and what their political views are.
- We want an EU that is economically just.
- We want an EU that cherishes its cultural heritage, is resilient enough to actively open itself up to everyone who embraces these values as their own, and an EU that fosters the possibilities and advantages that migration entails.

We want a European Union which is conscious of its past, self-reflective in the present, and open to the future

The European Union is currently presiding over a surge of right-wing populist parties and the decline of democratic institutions in various member states. The defection of the United Kingdom has proven the fragility of this confederation of states. High unemployment among youth, harsh austerity measures that exacerbate inequality between member states, a rise in racially motivated violence, and the loss of hundreds of lives to terrorism are just some of the issues that we look to the European Union to solve – not to mention the many thousands drowning every day when overcrowded boats are sinking off the EU's coastlines. It may be unnecessary, however at this point we wish to emphasise that the most recent influx of migrants into Europe was not the cause for the EU's current struggles, but rather a catalyst which broke open a wound that had been festering under the surface for decades.

> *2015 and 2016 can be considered as possibly the weariest years in the modern history of European Integration and the maintenance of European Values in the globalized Europe. The emergence of radical extremism in Western Europe shaken by the tragic events of terror in France, Belgium and Germany, as well as the largely disputed migrant policy of the EU Government have led to the eruption of Euroscepticism in the founding Member States of the EU, commencing the process of disintegration of the unified Europe created by Monnet and Schuman in 1957.*
>
> **Oleksandr Zhuravskyy**, Ukraine

Despite these worrying developments, establishment figures insist on carrying on with business as usual - a tactic that will eventually lead to societal breakdown. Right now, we are in the initial stages of this breakdown, at a turning point where positive change is still feasible.

In order to understand the present European Angst, it must be acknowledged that international migration is part and parcel of globalization. Referring to the recent migration phenomenon as a 'crisis' demonstrates a fundamental misunderstanding of how globalization works. Similarly, ignoring unchallenged neoliberal imperialism and its damaging impact on other countries exacerbates the migration 'crisis' and furthers the legitimation of right-wing populists.

> *The atmosphere of fear, threat and uncertainty is polluting the air in Europe.*
>
> **Katerina Jakimovska**, Macedonia

II.   The Triumphant Return of Nationalism

Which societal realities have allowed far-right nationalists to legitimise themselves once more within Europe?

There are two fundamental – and so far unchallenged – problems that set the stage for the European Angst we are currently experiencing.

1) Neoliberal consensus: there is a general feeling that the current economic infrastructure widens the societal gap and makes many people feel disadvantaged, left behind, and deceived. This has significantly contributed to a growing alienation of citizens from the so-called 'elites', because they no longer feel that they are heard or represented.

2) Colonial legacies: the notion of Western supremacy. The new right-wing movements revive sentiments of supremacy through clever rhetoric of 'protecting' Europeans and 'their' values by manipulating the general public's sense of uncertainty and insecurity.

Let us explore these problems in more detail:

The neoliberal consensus in European politics has contributed to the deterioration of economic and social circumstances, the widening of the economic gap, and many lay the blame on its policies for the erosion of the welfare state. In turn, this has led to many feeling 'left behind' and finding themselves in a constant financial limbo that fosters stress and anxiety.

> *This unrest and angst created by financial downturn paved way for the right wing politicians to put forward their agenda of close-minded nationalism and fear mongering by blaming the "other" which ranges from immigrants to the EU officials.*
>
> **Muhammad Arslan Yaseen**, Pakistan

> *The 'forgotten,' the working class white male is the centrepiece to the current upheaval in our political and societal environments. They live in rich nations, around them exists prosperity however they don't 'feel' it.*
>
> **Aidan Harkin**, Ireland

Opaque negotiations of agreements such as the TTIP and CETA, tough austerity measures for the population during the financial crisis, and the infamous TINA ("There Is No Alternative") rhetoric have all caused a large part of the population to question the impact their voices can have through existing democratic instruments. The result is a growing alienation of citizens from the political elites.

> *Whenever extremism comes forth, it is because politics is unable to channel the people's will towards concrete decision about their polis, their political community.*
>
> **Breno Assis de Andrade**, Brazil

> *I find the theory suggesting that extremist violence occurs more frequently in countries and regions where extremist views are not represented in the political arena fascinating. This theory indicates that the growing disconnect between political 'elites' and the general public is a significant explanation for extremism.*
>
> **Rebecca Hyland**, Australia

On top of economic hardships and uncertainties, many struggle with an environment that is changing ever more rapidly. Globalisation, new technologies, individualisation in the name of liberalism, the breaking up of traditions, values, roles, and social bonds have all led to a state of uncertainty, ambivalence, and insecurity.

> *Globalisation, technological change and the importance of the supranational institutions have made society more complex. This has resulted in the gap between the political elite and the citizens.*
>
> **Ermin Zec**, Bosnia and Herzegovina

> *That environment, with presence of economic and social insecurity, creates opportunity for political populism to successfully reach a wide spectrum and structure of the population.*
>
> **Antonio Kursar**, Croatia

It must also be noted that the Europe Union has failed to construct a European identity that is inclusive and open to newcomers. Therefore, it is easy for right-wing movements to revive a sense of nationalist pride and a lingering desire for Western supremacy. They exploit this notion by employing a discourse which, on the one hand, largely avoids overtly racist slogans, but on the other hand, specifically emphasises the need to 'protect our liberal European values'. Instead of countering this discourse by voicing what those European values truly are and establishing a productive counter-narrative, many politicians from mainstream parties are trying to trump the far-right (pun inevitable), and are failing miserably. The emotional strings being pulled by these anti-immigrant, populist movements cannot be countered without well-rounded, considered policies that similarly evoke a sense of unity, pride and urgency.

> *We deal with the effects of the crisis of identity of Europe, including secularisation, occurring in parallel with out-dated social-democratic ideas and the absence of a new comprehensive system of values.*
>
> **Aleksandra Gładka**, Poland

> *Nowadays, we can see how people keep killing each other just because they think their beliefs are the only true ones.*
>
> **Daniella Aruina**, Russia

> *Initially, a person holds a non-extremist view about for example, religion. As the time passes, the person gets to know more about the religion and starts to be bias towards one direction while ignoring the other side of the story. The person will also start to identify oneself as part of the group and as such will unconsciously become and act more like them, a concept known as divergence.*
>
> **Arvesa Studenica**, Kosovo

III.   The xenophobic backlash and why language is never innocent

Why has the so-called 'migration crisis' so quickly and so forcefully become the main outlet for Europe's troubled state of mind?

> *Before the Muslims, for example, arrived in Europe stories on them have arrived. These stories determined how the people of Europe would perceive this 'other' for the rest of a dozen of centuries. That is why conspiracy theories about*

> *the 'other' have always found ground in society feeding on the lack of encounter with the other.*
>
> **Zehra Haliloğlu**, Turkey

Words and narratives create our realities and determine how we see the world around us. Unfortunately, we can currently observe how powerful words can be, and how they can lay the groundwork for actions that are beyond the 'empty rhetoric' and expectations of those espousing them.

> *If we look closely into the media environment following some of the largest world atrocities, we can notice a pattern of conduct, which was started by the misuse of collective memory in media and eventually resulted in outbursts of violence and hate speech.*
>
> **Naida Softic**, Bosnia and Herzegovina

> *Despite its omnipresence, the terms radicalisation, extremism and xenophobia is equally highly contested and has been criticized for its opacity, securing components and depolarizing effects.*
>
> **Søren Wartoe**, Denmark

But why has this particular 'crisis' caused such unprecedented upheaval in European societies?

For decades, politicians have discussed migration primarily under the framework of securitisation and treated migrants as a threat to stability and the integrity of the state, instead of talking about migration within the framework of human rights and the empowerment of marginalised groups. The continuation of deliberate eversion from discussing migration within the framework of empowerment has led to the further alienation of migrant communities, the spread of ethnic-tensions, as well as more racially-motivated violence.

> *The resource narrative is one that has proven highly successful in scaremongering amongst people: "Refugees will steal your work, your tax money will be spent on refugees instead of healthcare, there will be no space for you to build houses because of the number of refugees".*
>
> **Judit Molnár**, Hungary

The political, intellectual, and media 'elites' have taken far too long to unmask right-wing discourse, and have looked on silently as the far- and extreme-right parties and media groups dictated the tone of reporting on the 'refugee crisis' and dominated discussion of the challenges that come with integration. Right-wing populists claim to be the voice of the people because they were the first to acknowledge that the alienation of the elites from the people led political leaders to ignore their concerns and fears. So far, their xenophobic solutions to the 'crisis' have remained largely unchallenged.

> *The increase of racism can be a reality in Europe's future if it remains unchallenged by the existing political institutions, media sources and society as a whole. Racist attitudes are even more encouraged by the lack of representation and empowerment of immigrant populations within political, social, economic and cultural life. Until then distrust, fear and scapegoating of migrants will spread further in our society.*
>
> **Lilija Alijeva**, Latvia

It must also be noted how decisive a role the media played in framing the 'refugee crisis'. It seems that some media groups have given up on nuanced journalism and fact-checking, and instead actively feed stereotypes, myths and echo conspiracy theories for their own financial gain, disregarding the harm this can do to social cohesion and the European state of mind.

> *The media may have contributed in blocking our ability to feel affect for some people with whom we share humanity as such.*
>
> **Ermelinda Xheza**, Greece

> *The danger of preconceived ethnic notions of refugees or immigrants is that they build up racist stereotypes and reduce immigrants to their "essences" or in other words, their mass-mediatised representations. Once it accumulates to a cultural mass, racist stereotyping of, for instance male Muslim refugees from the Middle East, will increase Islamophobia, linking the religion to absurd behaviours which are in the end not representative of the religion itself.*
>
> **Yen Duong Do Bao**, Vietnam

> *If conspiracies turned mainstream, they can easily become a political tool and a gun able to overthrow an existing political regime or threaten a democracy.*
>
> **Markéta Krejčí**, Czech Republic

Sadly, it has become a lot easier to construct one's reality à la carte. Alternative media sources, social media in particular, provide 'echo chambers' where people can block out information that does not fit into their world-view - and often algorithms block it out for them. The frequent manipulation of facts and information on social media and in biased news sources has inevitably led to an increased tolerance towards manipulation and hate speech in established media.

> *Over the last decade, the rise of an alternative media has created an alternate reality for large segments of the European and American population.*
>
> **Eric Daniel Adamson**, Sweden

> *People only "follow" and "like" pages on those platforms that confirm their pre existing norms, opinions and values, transforming those platforms in*

> *metaphorical echo chambers, connecting large groups of similar minded people.*
>
> **Pjotr Sauer**, Netherlands

Last but not least, the public debate on refugees and migrants bears testimony to a certain paradox of tolerance: inhumane opinions and racist propaganda are often left uncontested in the name of tolerance and freedom of speech. Even obvious untruths and myths have been able to thrive, since they continue to be left unchallenged for far too long.

> *White nationalists – seizing the opportunity for voter mobilization – express their ignorant prejudices proudly and without challenge across establishment media, and pretend somehow as if their prejudices have, in a democratic sense, enriched the public debate.*
>
> **Daniel Lockwood**, U.S.A.

IV.   What is to be done?

Right now, the fundamental idea of the European Union – 'united in diversity' – is covered under the debris of an economic crisis, diplomatic crises within Europe and with countries outside the EU, the so-called 'migration crisis', as well as the crisis of the exponential growth of Euro-scepticism. It is high time EU leaders took people's concerns about the current situation, as well as their visions for the future, into consideration!

> *We do need to protect 'our' 'European' values, but not from migrants. We need to protect them from those who would wish to pervert them to forward their racist agenda.*
>
> **Sonja Marie Thielen**, Germany

What can be done to resuscitate the European spirit, to bring the fundamental idea of the EU back to life?
We need to counter the visions and agendas of those who want to revert Europe to a narrow-minded, exclusive club of member states, where only money and goods can roam free. We need a common dream for Europe, we need politicians who stand up for this dream, and we need to empower civil society actors to make it come true.

> *Voices of civil society actors, who actually keep democracy (and Europe) alive, defending it against the increasing anxiety, should be empowered.*
>
> **Anna-Lena Sender**, Germany

To reach the dream of a united and inclusive Europe that at the same time cherishes and protects its diversity we need to focus on small-scale projects that are feasible, but make a noticeable difference in people's lives. We should not try to battle populists on their home-

turf, but should instead demonstrate with concrete examples and projects how to improve people's livelihoods and Europe in general.

> *Achieving small targets enhances confidence and trust, strengthens the central tendency of cooperation, and produces the effect of synergy, with the minor extremist elements gathering in the periphery around the central attractor of cooperation and integration.*
>
> **Anzhalika Yeraminovich**, Belarus

Populism and extremism thrive when people feel that their concerns, hopes, and fears are at odds with the current political and societal norms; when they no longer feel represented by the political leaders and lose hope in the ability and willingness of 'elites' to address their issues. It is therefore vital to open up political and public debates, to give space to concerns about open borders, global trade, and the challenge of integrating newly arrived refugees into host societies. We need to reclaim from populist parties the critical discussions about the challenges, problems and opportunities of migration. We have to develop a dialogue with those who feel marginalised by globalisation, and address and genuinely listen to the concerns of those who disagree with us. While condemning sensationalist language and making it clear that there is no room for racism, hate, and xenophobia in Europe, we need to move beyond simply preaching to the choir, so that those who feel ignored can begin to feel part of the solution.

> *Let us not leave the field of discussion about real problems to lying extremists for the sake of political correctness – what we need are honest debates based on facts.*
>
> **Lena Kornprobst**, Austria

> *As young activists, we need to combat xenophobia and racism through counter-narratives. We have the moral duty to challenge hate speech and extremism, in order to have a more peaceful future.*
>
> **David Ruah**, Portugal

In summary, what would all this look like in practice?

1) Ensure societal and economic stability!

☐ Take people's struggle for their livelihoods into consideration. In every communication, advertisement, speech and press release, take notice of these struggles and address them in your policies. People who are afraid of social and/or economic decline, or who are already struggling, will most likely not welcome 'strangers', who supposedly depend on state welfare - hence their reluctance to allow further immigration to occur. Take this on board and address these concerns in every action and statement.

- Introduce a Europe-wide living wage that is tied to inflation and the requirements of the cost of living.

- Make it transparent what newcomers receive in terms of welfare support and material aid. Communicate what is spent on public services as a whole.

- Regard and promote migrants as a valuable future workforce and an opportunity to counter the over-ageing of the European population.

- Understand the mechanisms of social organisations and boundary-making. Use these insights to foster the positive development of societies, e.g. through architecture and the design of cities to create spaces of contact. This will help to avoid ghettoization and harmful gentrification of European cities and towns.

   > *Extremism is a word that must be taken seriously but language is crucial when using such terms. Current extremism, which has tragically claimed the lives of many people globally, is the result of relentless invasion, occupation and proxy wars in the Middle East. Extremism manifests itself in the minds of desperate people and they manipulated by an opportunistic minority. When one analyses the origin of extremism one must analyse the circumstances under and the conditions that lead to the creation of such groups.*
   >
   > **Naoise Ó Cíanáin Ó Faoláin**, Ireland

- Invest in teacher training and integration programmes that improve education systems - this will benefit not only the newcomers, but also the native populations.

   > *I come from a town where Christians and Muslims grow up and live together, and I know that Islam does not teach violence. For this reason, I would like to focus on one of the social reasons – lack of good education.*
   >
   > **Velislava – Mihaela Krachunova**, Bulgaria

- Promote intercultural exchanges in primary and secondary education. Include global perspectives into the curricula from an early stage, so children are encouraged to consider themselves global citizens.

   > *Primary and secondary education is often neglected but it is obvious that this is the age when young people form their core ideas, which get developed during their further education. We need to remember young people who do not enrol at universities or who drop out.*
   >
   > **Stefan Ubiparipović**, Serbia

2) Build a different EU!

☐ The EU can no longer be the scapegoat for failed national policies. In order for people to regain their trust in the project, it must be made more transparent, democratic, and socially-minded.

☐ Support pro-European regional movements. Further develop minority rights, both of established minorities and of newly-formed minorities.

☐ Rebuild trust in expert opinions and objective analysis, as well as in the independent media. Initiate a Europe-wide media platform that is accessible to every citizen, which is available in all official EU languages and that deals with the issues facing citizens from every corner of the continent.

☐ Promote positive change in the different European educational systems by adopting democratic education as a guideline for action. Democracy and its values cannot simply be taught, they must be lived in practice: therefore, the only way for people to believe in the European project and truly engage with it is by experiencing democracy from an early age.

☐ Include education about the history of the EU, about its workings and benefits on a political level, but also on a cultural level in the curricula.

> *The priority is nowadays to modernise the European communication tools in order to reach a larger audience by making it even more accessible. Social media deserves to be considered as a new way to promote and above all explain the European action.*
>
> **Pauline Margot Grimmer**, France

☐ Establish a EU-identity! Encourage people to reflect on what it means to be a European citizen, what their personal advantages are and why the EU won the Nobel Peace Prize.

☐ Young people must speak up – also at the polls! The youth of Europe need to take their democratic duties seriously.

☐ To promote voter turnout among the younger generation, politics – especially at the EU level – needs to become more transparent and more understandable. Invest in research into how to best target this group. Be frank and open in your communications.

> *In my opinion, this lack of knowledge enables Eurosceptic parties to gain votes, especially in rough times like the European crisis, where fears are stroked and the EU is heavily criticized. Secondly, I believe that Europe lacks a common European identity, which especially becomes noticeable now regarding the*

> *refugee crisis, where many countries are not able or willing to think above national interests.*
>
> **Anna Kristina Alder**, Switzerland

> *Action must be taken by the European Institutions on a cultural level, to change the hearts and minds of citizens before the political level will even so much as budge.*
>
> **Annabelle Joynson**, Great Britain

☐ Find a common solution to the 'refugee crisis'!

> *Although there are some sort of solutions proposed like the quotas prescribed to host refugees or the EU-Turkey agreement, I think that still the problem hasn't been solved and it won't be, until the EU will break its heavily fortified walls and choose a European end to this crisis.*
>
> **Inva Nela**, Albania

☐ Ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Their Families (1990), which provides key requirements such as: to respect and to ensure the rights in the convention without any discrimination; to make migrants free from inhuman or degrading treatment; to provide freedom of thought, conscience and religion and prevention from unlawful attacks on his/her honour and reputation.

☐ Ramp up the effort to counter terrorism and radicalisation, in order to ensure a feeling of safety, without using it as an excuse to undermine fundamental democratic rights.

☐ Ensure the independence of media and the legal system in all EU member states.

3) Give migrants a voice: facilitate and encourage inter-cultural encounters!

> *We as a society must overcome the immediate feeling of fear, and this can only happen through personal encounters and individual experiences made with the so called "Other". We have to meet, talk, eat and drink with people who are different than us in order to live according to humanist values, which should be universal and self-evident.*
>
> **Itamar Gov**, Israel/Germany

☐ Help people understand where migrants come from, where they want to go, and help them to make their voices heard.

☐ Empower migrant populations and their social and political representatives.

> *I'm an Algerian immigrant living in Spain. I grew up in a Muslim household, in which my dad never learned Spanish and hardly ever interacted with anyone outside the family, my mom did learn the language, made some friends and got a low level job, and my sister went on to learn several languages, earn two masters degrees and now works for the UN. I know for a fact that there are many "migrant experiences" in our continent [...] in order to help migrants, we need to understand where they come from, and make their voices heard so that we understand where they want to go.*
>
> **Djalel Boukerdenna**, Algeria

☐ Establish centres where representatives from diverse religions, atheists and agnostics, intellectuals and theologians can meet and discuss the critical issues of our time without fear or judgement.

> *I would talk about the importance of changing attitude from assimilating the other to 'mutual adaption' especially in the case of Islam and how that can lead to a version of 'European Islam', which not only can help curb security and social dangers but also allow for the emergence of a model, which can be used in other contexts.*
>
> **Dana Nawzar Ali Jaf**, Iraq

☐ Further empower civil society actors and projects.

> *I think that it is not the only duty of member states to deal with challenges, but it is also the duty of individuals, citizens of EU member countries, and representatives of other European nations to take their part in building a strong European commonwealth.*
>
> **Diana Khomeriki**, Georgia

☐ Support continental and international networks of collaboration for young people of both native and foreign backgrounds. For example, introduce "Diversity Ambassadors":

> *Diversity Ambassadors could be young people coming from different social and economic backgrounds as well as young refugees and migrants. The "Diversity Ambassadors" can help Europe to write a new narrative: A narrative towards a vibrant democracy and inclusive societies. [...] Young people appear to be less divided than policy makers and would like to see politicians do more to welcome and integrate refugees into the fabric of European society.*
>
> **Athanasia Konstantinou**, Cyprus

☐ Find new frameworks for discussing the reception of migrants. For example, consider the concept of hospitality:

> *The concept of hospitality can be situated at the centre of migration discourse, thus transforming the attitude towards migration. In contemporary Western society, hospitality is a word often taken for granted. The concept of hospitality has the potential to provide new frameworks for confronting broad political challenges from interstate relations to the refugee crisis. Normatively, hospitality theory reflects upon the identity of the stranger, the ethics of admitting strangers, and the moral obligations that follow from the dynamics of encountering the Other.*

Danishwara Nathaniel, Indonesia

4) Listen, communicate, open your eyes, and challenge your own perceptions!

> *I have a colleague that has migrated to Austria from Syria and I have to say I have never met a more kind and compassionate person in my life. He has dealt with racism in Austria and elsewhere in Europe he travelled to and does feel afraid sometimes but still most of the people accept him and he feels safe and happy to be able to live his life in peace. It has always been my belief that you are not defined by the colour of your skin, the language you speak, the way you were born but from the way you treat and empower others around you, your contribution to society and your will to change and adapt to life as it passes by and give the same opportunity to your fellow human*

Klemen Habat, Slovenia

> *In fact, most people just do not understand how ridiculous this way of thinking is and how much absurdity it contains. Unfortunately I had to deal with this issue from my early childhood, since racism is a very characteristic belief among Armenians due to the Armenian-Turkish conflict and the Armenian Genocide. However, growing older and communicating with people of diverse ethnic origins, I came to believe that the ethnicity or the color of skin can never be true indicators of a person's innate characteristics.*

Tamara Harutyunyan, Armenia

Let us all start now to build a strong and welcoming society which is conscious of its past, self-reflective in the present, and open to the future within a European Union that lives up to its own expectations!

Sincerely,

We,

The Undersigned,

Students of Europe.