

Statement – Young Leaders’ Meeting 2025

A Vision for a Sovereign and Resilient Europe

Introduction

This statement outlines young liberal leaders’ position on strengthening European strategic autonomy through empowering youth and local action. It calls for a bold, comprehensive approach that integrates robust defence readiness, dynamic economic independence, secured digital sovereignty, and resilient food systems. This strategy must be firmly anchored in democratic participation and sustainability. Young Europeans are not just future beneficiaries; they are essential, active contributors to the design and implementation of these policies. By decisively investing in local innovation, civic engagement, and regional resilience, the European Union can build a more secure, truly sovereign, and inclusive future.



Defence Readiness

Europe faces increasingly complex security challenges, including hybrid threats, foreign interference, and disinformation campaigns. These threats directly undermine democratic institutions and erode public trust.

We need an improved **EU preparedness strategy** that takes into consideration a proactive, holistic approach. An important step includes significantly increased defence procurement coordination between member states, strategic partners and allies.

To that end, young leaders call for a **binding European framework** to enhance security and defence collaboration.

To bolster **Europe's technological independence**, we must leverage the European Defence Fund to invest in key, disruptive technologies like AI and next-generation defence. This framework must also enhance our resilience against hybrid warfare by strengthening intelligence-sharing and developing common standards to protect critical infrastructure, ensuring genuine military mobility and responsiveness across the continent.

Education and youth engagement

Young liberals urge European policymakers to **prioritise active youth engagement** as a key strategic asset in countering these challenges. Young people must be equipped with the tools to critically identify and effectively respond to disinformation, participate in civic education programmes, and lead local resilience initiatives.

Furthermore, youth involvement in shaping strategic autonomy policies should be institutionalised through support for grassroots movements, youth councils, and leadership programmes at both local and EU levels.

These **institutionalised youth councils** should have the right to propose legislation to be debated in national parliaments.

To that end, young leaders advocate for a system inspired by the Council of Europe's Co-Management model, where **young people and governments share power** on a true 50:50 basis. This approach has proved that equal partnership makes policies more democratic, innovative, and future-proof.

Bringing education curricula into the 21st century means equipping young people with the skills they need to thrive in today's society, from mental health awareness and digital competence to democratic participation and financial literacy.

Young liberal leaders call for **enhanced Erasmus+ opportunities** for school students, apprentices, and vocational learners, recognising education as a critical driver of a skilled workforce essential to Europe's strategic autonomy.

Europe's resilience must extend beyond institutions to embrace democratic participation, civic literacy, and inclusive policymaking. A stronger Europe depends on the active engagement of its youngest citizens.

Economic and Energy Independence

Today, the EU still struggles to attract and retain businesses at the scale needed to drive sustainable growth and competitiveness. To **achieve true economic and energy independence**, we must shift towards a more private sector-driven approach, fostering innovation and entrepreneurship as the engines of Europe's prosperity.

To support the private sector-driven growth necessary for economic and energy independence, LYMEC calls for a **fully integrated Capital Markets Union (CMU)**. A unified CMU is vital for providing European businesses, especially SMEs, with easier access to diverse funding and for mobilising the private investment needed to scale up green technologies and enhance EU competitiveness.

To **reduce Europe's vulnerability** to external shocks and supply chain disruptions, the liberal youth advocates for the **revitalisation of local industries** - particularly in strategic sectors such as renewable

energy, green technologies, and sustainable manufacturing. Municipalities should be empowered to lead energy transition projects that contribute to the EU's climate goals while enhancing regional self-sufficiency.

This approach not only supports the European Green Deal but also fosters economic resilience by creating jobs, stimulating innovation, and reducing reliance on critical imports. **Young entrepreneurs and local cooperatives should be supported** through targeted funding, training, and access to EU programmes that promote sustainable industrial development. Economic independence must be built from the ground up, with youth and local communities at the forefront.

Digital Sovereignty

Europe's digital infrastructure remains heavily dependent on external providers, posing risks to data security, privacy, and technological autonomy. Young liberal leaders call for increased investment in **secure, decentralised data systems** and the development of regional innovation hubs that promote open-source technologies and digital entrepreneurship.

Digital sovereignty must also include a robust **strategy for digital skills development**, particularly among young people. By equipping youth with the competencies needed to thrive in the digital economy (in light of a job market influenced by AI and automation), Europe can ensure that towns and regions contribute meaningfully to a **cohesive and secure digital ecosystem**. Policymakers should prioritise inclusive access to digital education, support for youth-led tech initiatives, and the integration of digital literacy into formal education systems.

Food Security

Global disruptions, from climate change to geopolitical instability, have exposed vulnerabilities in Europe's food systems. Young liberal

leaders support a **transition toward sustainable agricultural practices** rooted in local knowledge, biodiversity protection, and circular economy principles.

These practices not only enhance environmental sustainability but also strengthen food sovereignty by reducing dependence on global supply chains.

To ensure a fair market for our farmers and uphold our standards, we insist on a level playing field: all food imports must comply with the same environmental, safety, and welfare standards applied to EU production. Policymakers should **align local food strategies with EU-level objectives** to ensure access to healthy, affordable food for all citizens, while crucially ensuring profitability for producers through fair pricing mechanisms and reduced administrative burdens.

Youth-led agricultural cooperatives, urban farming initiatives, and educational programmes on sustainable food systems should be actively supported.

Furthermore, **clear 'EU Produced' labelling** is necessary to provide informed consumers with the transparency they need to choose locally and sustainably sourced products. Building **resilient local food networks** is essential to safeguarding public health, environmental integrity, and long-term food security.

Conclusion

Strategic autonomy must be understood as a dynamic, multidimensional goal encompassing defence, economy, digital infrastructure, and food systems. It cannot and will not be achieved through top-down directives alone. Young liberal leaders demand that European institutions and member states immediately recognise and act upon the indispensable role of young people and local communities in shaping Europe's future. The time for action is now: invest in youth, empower local communities, and secure a truly sovereign, liberal Europe.



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