

# The School Students' Political Guide to the European Parliament Elections

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## What

Leading up to the elections of the European Parliament, OBESSU has reached out to political groups and parties on the European level, to learn more about how their plans for the upcoming 5 years of the European Union relate to what school students want to see happen. Those who answered us, we are sharing their inputs with you in this document.

## Why

We wanted to help you get informed and make a choice in this election. For some of you, this is the first time you get to do it, or you might be following closely to see what to do in 5 years when you get to be a first-time voter. So understanding who stands for what is important!

## How

The groups and parties received our Manifesto and were asked to give us their reaction, as well as their plans in general related to education and school students, based on some guiding questions. You can find the answers we received from each of them here.

Enjoy reading!

# European People's Party (EPP)

***To what extent do you think your political manifesto mirrors the claims expressed in the Manifesto of OBESSU?***

We believe that we are strong partners for building an inclusive Europe where no one is left behind. We are convinced that we must do more to help young people to fulfill their aspirations. We are committed to equality of opportunity because we cannot afford to lose anyone if we want to have a well functioning society. Making sure that everyone has economic opportunities is key and that's why we are committed to creating 5 million new jobs over the next years and to investing in making all European regions competitive. Climate change is a big global challenge and we are convinced that we must respect the Paris and Katowice accords, but also to build on them to have more ambitious targets in the future. We must leave our planet in good health for the next generation. This means investing in sustainable technologies and performing a well-managed transition to a sustainable future.

***What are the priorities in the field of education and training for your programme for 2019-2024?***

Our priorities in the field of education and training are vocational training programmes and supporting a life-long learning approach in all Member States. The world is changing at an ever-faster pace and we must make sure that vocational training schemes equip people with future-proof skills. We need to support lifelong learning programmes to answer the challenge of technological change so that those currently in employment are given the opportunities to constantly update their knowledge and learn new skills.

***How do you plan on carrying out your programme successfully in an area of policy - education - that is so strongly in the capacity of member states?***

Education is indeed mainly the prerogative of the Member States, but the European Union still has a lot to contribute and many ways to do so. Crucial to reaching our goals is to work very closely together with the Member States to convince them of the importance of changes to education policy to prepare our students better for the future. The second resource at our disposal are the EU funding programmes and we are determined to use both. We are committed to tripling the budget of Erasmus+ because we believe that in the future we should be even more interconnected. Therefore, we want to make sure that more of our young people have the opportunity to study, train, have experiences, or volunteer abroad.

***How do you see your group cooperating with school students to reach the goals you set in your programme?***

We are committed to improving transparency of EU decision-making and bringing our Union back to the people. This also means our group is committed to evidence-based policy-making. We are always open to meeting with experts, listening to their advice, and learning from them. We believe that OBESSU has a lot to contribute to finding future-proof policies in education sector.

# Party of European Socialists (PES)

***To what extent do you think your political manifesto mirrors the claims expressed in the Manifesto of OBESSU?***

Our priorities are OBESSU's priorities – quality education for all, human rights, promoting wellbeing, safeguarding European values, democratic participation, and saving the environment. We believe that access to quality inclusive education at every stage of life reduces and prevents inequalities. It is through access to education, culture and vocational education and training that we can develop both critical thinking and openness, and ensure social and mental well-being of school students. We want Europe to be a leader in fighting for the environment and tackling climate change. And in order to make our societies greener, more inclusive and fairer, we must prioritise investments in education, empower young people and enhance their involvement in decisions which impact them.

***What are the priorities in the field of education and training for your programme for 2019-2024?***

We recognise the value of being able to study across the EU. We want to strengthen Erasmus+ so we can increase opportunities to study abroad. Erasmus+ must be made more inclusive and accessible, with a strong focus on young people with few opportunities. We want to establish a European Education Area with mutual recognition of diplomas and learning periods, so your achievements in one country count in every member state. We support using new technology to improve all education and training, and this would include providing internet access for all and guaranteeing better connectivity for schools. Alongside this, we want a set proportion of all school curricula to be dedicated to teaching history and European civic education.

***How do you plan on carrying out your programme successfully in an area of policy - education - that is so strongly in the capacity of member states?***

Education is a right everyone, at every stage of life, should enjoy - it is a tool for personal development. Although it is a policy area which national governments control, it is one of the areas that benefits the most from cross border cooperation and sharing of best practice. We will push the European Union towards closer cooperation with and between member states. The European policy for education must support learning and reverse the trend towards education cuts in member states – we need solid budgets for educational investment. This approach will provide the best education and training for all citizens.

***How do you see your group cooperating with school students to reach the goals you set in your programme?***

As socialists and social democrats, we will continue our close cooperation with students and youth organisations. We value your input, at our conferences, seminars and all other events. We want to give you the opportunity to take the floor and share your ideas. This is why we consulted OBESSU when drafting our electoral program for these European elections. We will continue to defend your right to have your voice heard by decision makers on important policies which concern you. We also want to reinforce European initiatives benefiting directly school students notably by reinforcing school exchanges at European level or providing them the opportunity to volunteer.

## European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR)

The ECR Group will campaign for a strong Erasmus programme that includes mobility for traineeships, sports training and vocational education in addition to high education. This will be underpinned by achieving the other objectives of the European Education Area strategy, in particular as regards mutual recognition of qualifications.

We also believe the EU should continue to support Member States by providing high quality evidence-based research and a forum for the exchange of ideas and best practise between national experts. We think that in time this will lead to a convergence of educational systems, similarly to the Bologna process.

We encourage Member States to pursue pupil-centred approaches to education policy in order to foster autonomous, responsible citizens, with an emphasis on critical thinking and open discussion of ideas, particularly important in the context of 'fake news' and 'media literacy'. Families must be empowered to choose between competing schools in order to drive up standards.

If Europe is to lead the forthcoming digital transformation it is imperative that we increase IT education in schools. To that end we support greater coordination at EU level and substantial investment (e.g. Digital Europe).

Finally, inclusive policies must make education accessible and welcoming to all.

# Europe of Nations and Freedom(ENF)

***To what extent do you think your political manifesto mirrors the claims expressed in the Manifesto of OBESSU?***

The ENF supports the notion that education is a fundamental right that should be accessible to all. However, access to quality education for citizens of a member state should be a priority; citizen students should not receive lower quality education because of a huge influx of migrants from other countries. In addition, while the ENF confirms the importance of accessible and affordable education, it should be emphasised that these social benefits with regard to education should be balanced by students' responsibility to work hard and show dedication. Furthermore, the ENF is a strong supporter of academically independent educational institutions and fiercely believes that educators should not impose their political ideals on students.

***What are the priorities in the field of education and training for your programme for 2019-2024?***

Education policy is the responsibility of member states and not the EU. The political alliance of the ENF is founded on the principle of sovereignty of states and their citizens. This means that member states should remain free to determine their own education and training priorities and policies. Although we strongly support voluntary cooperation between member states in the field of education, we reject any policy that is designed to create a European super-state, or that seeks to transfer national sovereignty to the EU.

***How do you plan on carrying out your programme successfully in an area of policy - education - that is so strongly in the capacity of member states?***

As stated above we are of the opinion that education policies should remain within the competence of the member states. They are best suited to determine education policies in their own countries.

***How do you see your group cooperating with school students to reach the goals you set in your programme?***

We confirm that the ENF is a proponent of individual freedom and of protecting freedom of speech. These freedoms should also be protected when it comes to school students. In this regard, the ENF will emphasise the rights of students to hold a political view of their choice, and will fiercely protect the right to express this view (within the limits of the law), no matter how unpopular it may be.

## Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)

As regards your first question, the priorities outlined in your Manifesto broadly correspond to the main ideas presented in our electoral platform "*Freedom, opportunity, prosperity: the Liberal vision for the future of Europe*", which was adopted by the ALDE Party Congress in Madrid in November 2018.

Most importantly, access to education is regarded in our programme as a civil right to empower everyone. The programme makes specific reference to gender equality and empowerment of women, an objective that cannot be achieved without equal access of girls to education. The programme also calls for improving the legal framework for those seeking education or vocational training in the EU.

Our main objectives in the field of education and training are presented in our programme under the heading "*A Europe of innovation and opportunities for all*":

In an era when people increasingly change jobs and careers, we need to strengthen our knowledge economy by investing in research and innovation, and equipping our workforce with the right set of skills for the 21st century while bridging the generational digital skills gap.

We therefore promote education that focuses on critical thinking, entrepreneurial and soft skills, flexibility, and systemic and interdisciplinary thinking, which matches the real needs of the labour market. We consider education to be a life-long learning process starting at early childhood education, so we want more investments in educational and vocational training, more apprenticeships, and broader participation in the Erasmus projects, as well as strategically investing more in digital infrastructure and programmes to produce a smart workforce for the future.

As your Manifesto rightly points out, education is a policy area mainly within the remit not only of Member States but also of regions and municipalities.

We believe that, as a matter of principle, decisions should be taken at the appropriate level - local, regional, national or European - to best serve the citizens. We are nevertheless open to re-examine the division of competences between the European Union and its Member States keeping in mind the principles of simplification and subsidiarity. Anyway, even under the current legal framework, much can be done at EU level to support national efforts to improve education and training.

Erasmus is a clear example of supportive EU action, which has had a significant impact on education and training throughout the EU. I am glad to mention that the European Parliament recently adopted a first reading resolution on the new Erasmus programme (2021-2027). ALDE is strongly in favour of the tripling of the current budget for Erasmus and to expand exchange opportunities for students in secondary education and in vocational training.

# Party of the European left

***To what extent do you think your political manifesto mirrors the claims expressed in the Manifesto of OBESSU?***

For the Party of the European Left education is a human right and of course, it should be a priority. We support the Manifesto of OBESSU.

***What are the priorities in the field of education and training for your programme for 2019- 2024?***

We stand for the Right to universal public and free education. The educational process should be free and secular throughout the educational stream. The school must make the formative assessment the pillar of future responsible citizens.

***How do you plan on carrying out your programme successfully in an area of policy - education - that is so strong in the capacity of member states?***

We propose another way. We want to build Europe on a new basis of solidarity that respects the sovereignty of peoples. Our goal is to bring fresh hope. A new quest for cooperation and solidarity at the European level, in the service of our people and the people of the world. The Manifesto of the European Left proposes a democratic, social, environmental and peaceful basis for society.

***How do you see your group cooperating with school students to reach the goals you set in your programme?***

As Party of the European Left we have our own youth working group with students from all our member groups. This working group have also its own program at our Summer University, which we organise each year. Within these structures in our party, we discussed this also with Members of the European Parliament.