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YEPPer

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learning more about elections in Germany
and getting to know Junge ÖVP

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Editorial

The only weapon in democracy is to participate –YEPP interviews the President of the Portuguese Parliament

In the Foreign Affairs room of the Assembleia da Republica, the Portuguese Parliament, on the 10th of January YEPP Board members had the pleasure to meet and discuss with **José Pedro Aguiar-Branco, President of the National Assembly, and Ricardo Carvalho, Deputy Secretary General of Partido Social Democrata (PSD, EPP)** the role of the European Institutions in an international scenario of uncertainty. José Pedro Aguiar-Branco inspired YEPP through an interesting discussion on the true value of democracy and the challenging task of coping with rising extremism while ensuring freedom of expression. The president explained its fundamental role as an intermediary in the Parliament and debated with the young leaders on the topics of defence, security and the EU's international relations.

How is it currently split representation in the National Parliament and what is the importance of the speaker of the house?

The Portuguese Parliament is fragmented into 9 different groups. Reaching consensus is harder now than in the past and in this scenario the role of the speaker is more

central. The speaker has the purpose to facilitating the consensus in the assembly by meeting with leaders of each group. In particular, as a speaker I am interested in increasing the engagement of citizens and I encourage Portugal and Europe to work harder on defence. The future of the EU lies within its values of democracy, freedom, peace and rule of law and I am interested in hearing from you what new generations can do to enforce this future.

Regarding security, many European countries are far from spending 3 or even 2% of their GDP in defence. We risk having the capacity to increase expenditure just if we actually go to conflict. How do we get the political capital to increase this capacity before it is too late?

We need to create a political narrative explaining that security and defence are a priority. We cannot guaranty freedom and democracy without defence, and today's scenario is different from 10 years ago. In the 21st century we are putting in discussion values that for decades we kept for granted. Topics such as education, health and economy touch more easily people's





lives, but we need to explain that we will be able to protect them only if we secure our defence.

How do you see the role of Europe internationally?

As Europe we must have the power to establish our conditions at the international stage. For this to be possible, it is essential to work with the United States. We cannot live in a romantic dream of being alone in the international sphere without the US. However, we need to be stronger and the only weapon in democracy is to participate, be more active, be on the field. This is the reason why democracy requires a lot of work.

As President of the National Assembly, how do you keep your capacity to be cold blooded against strong emotions of political attacks and harsh discussions in the current political arena?

One point that is fundamental in our democracy is that all Members of Parliament have the same right to be there and express themselves. The main difficulty in democracy is to accept differences, to hear the other and discuss. It seems obvious, instead it is hard. Even when my opponent says something unacceptable, I need to listen to him and respect the mandate given by the people he/she represents. If we want to create an environment of respect and order, we need to be an example of leadership and I really think that this is achieved through giving the word to everyone. It is exactly the opposite of what Cancel Culture promotes.



What is PSD fighting for?

Health

Students in higher education institutions now have access to psychological and nutritional vouchers, enabling over 100.000 and 50.000 psychological and nutritional consultations respectively.

Menstrual hygiene products will be freely distributed in primary and secondary schools and health centres.

Housing

The PSD government has introduced several measures to improve housing access for young people. The “Porta 65” renting programme now supports more applicants, with no rent ceiling or requirement to present a contract in advance. The budget has increased, aiming to help 40.000 people this year. Additionally, first-time homebuyers under 35 are exempt from real estate transfer tax and stamp duty for homes worth up to €316.772. The government will also provide a public credit guarantee of up to 15% of the home price to help young buyers access private credit and reduce upfront costs.

Student housing

The government has allocated 7.4 million euros for higher education institutions to increase student housing for the academic year 2024/25. This is in addition to 709 housing units already available through government-owned infrastructure.

The housing supplement for students living away from home has increased, reaching 483,80€ in Lisbon. Eligibility for this supplement will also be broadened.

Income Tax Reform for Young People

One major priority has been the introduction of “IRS Jovem”, a new income tax schedule for young people (up to 35 years old). For the first ten years of a young person's working life, taxes for income below a threshold of around 28.700€ is reduced. The reduction is of 100% (total exemption) in the first year of earnings, then 25% until the fourth year, 50% until the seventh, and 25% until the tenth.

Transport

Introduction of the Green Railway Pass, costing 20€ per month and enabling unlimited travel across regional, inter-regional, inter-city and some urban trains. Over 50 thousand Green Railway Passes have been sold since the 21st of October.

Regarding public transport, all young people up to 23 years old have now access to a free public transport pass. Previously, only students were eligible, broadening the reach of this free pass to over 240.000 young people across the country.

Ricardo Carvalho

Deputy Secretary General of Partido Social Democrata (PSD, EPP)



Op-ed

JU Deutschlands: Campaign mode on for Bundestagswahl 2025

The federal election in February 2025 is approaching and Germany faces a decisive political crossroads. Amid a complex political landscape, the CDU and CSU (EPP) parties are presenting their campaigns with particular emphasis. Junge Union (JU) plays a central role.

“Ampel-Koalition” with SPD, Grüne and FPD messed up

Germany is in a time of multifaceted challenges: Economic uncertainties, migration issues, the necessity of consistent climate protection and ensuring social justice dominate the debates. At the same time, geopolitical tensions and European integration are putting sustained pressure on the Federal Government. Dissatisfaction with the current “traffic light coalition” has placed the Union parties in a favorable position, which they now aim to strategically leverage.

CDU and CSU: „Wieder nach vorne“ - “Forward again”

Led by Friedrich Merz, CDU and CSU focus on a clear message: Stability, economic strength, and modernized infrastructure. Merz emphasizes the importance of a strong middle class and a technolo-

gy-driven future in his appearances. The campaign focuses on restoring Germany as Europe’s economic leader. Another main point is to adapt migration policy. Many Germans see this as a big failure – for reasons.

Another central aspect is the promise to reduce bureaucracy and make the energy transition more efficient. At the same time, modernizing the education system is high on the agenda to keep Germany competitive in the long term.

Junge Union Campaign: “Deutschland auf die 1” - “Germany to Number 1”

Junge Union, the youth organization of CDU and CSU, plays an active and dynamic role in the election campaign. Under the motto “Germany to Number 1,” it sends a strong signal for the country’s future and the importance of young people in politics. The JU campaign includes several core initiatives:

1. Support Tour with Friedrich Merz: A bus filled with JU members tours Germany for three weeks, accompanying Friedrich Merz to his campaign events and supporting local candidates on-site. This visible and committed support aims to mobilize voter groups and invigorate the campaign with youthful energy.

2. Youth Voter Events with Young Candidates: Five young Bundestag candidates host special events addressing the concerns of the younger generation. With innovative concepts such as panel discussions, networking opportunities, and entertainment, they aim to attract and engage young voters for the Union.



3. Support on the Ground: Whether door-to-door campaigning, election booths, or creative actions, the JU actively supports young Bundestag candidates directly in their constituencies. This decentralized work aims to build trust and connect more closely with citizens.

4. 33 Campaign Events Nationwide: By the end of February, the Junge Union will have held 33 events across Germany. These events provide platforms for direct voter engagement, creative actions, and media-friendly appearances to spread the Union's political message.

Building castles in the air

The self-proclaimed Alternative for Germany (AfD, ESN) continues to position itself as a protest and mostly right extremist party, targeting voters dissatisfied with established politics. By focusing on migration issues, energy costs, and criticism of European integration, the AfD seeks to strengthen its base and tries to attract new voter groups, especially in Eastern Germany. Its strategic priorities lie in addressing the concerns of anxious and economically disadvantaged populations. AfD is the main opponent of the Union parties that are working on disenchanting the Anti-EU and pro-Russia populists.

The Greens are focusing heavily on climate protection and social justice. The party struggles to distance itself from the burdens of governing within the current government but is attempting to promote a positive vision for sustainable economics. Reality kicked out their ideology driven agendas that haven't worked while in office during the last years.

SPD (S&D) finds itself in a challenging position. As part of the current coalition, it tries to highlight successes such as raising the minimum wage but faces criticism for economic and social difficulties. Lead candidate is the weak Chancellor Olaf Scholz again, being seen as a not smart decision of the public.

Meanwhile, the FDP (Renew) positions itself as the party of economic freedom and digitalization but struggles to assert its core messages against its larger coalition partners. Their decision to leave the current coalition haven't had the impact they wanted to see: A rise in popularity.

23th February 2025 – let's win this

The CDU/CSU enters the campaign with ambitious goals and a clear plan. The initiative of the Junge Union, in particular, could make a decisive difference by addressing new target groups and increasing the campaign's dynamism. "Germany to Number 1" embodies the aspiration for a leading role in Europe and a clear vision for the country's future.

The upcoming federal election will be pivotal for Germany's and Europe's political landscape. The polls look promising but there is a lot of work to do.

For UpToDate info follow @junge_union and @teammerz2025 on Instagram.



Past Events

YEPP Board Meeting in Lisbon

First Board Meeting of the Year!

Between the 10th and 12th of January, YEPP gathered in Lisbon for the first Board Meeting of 2025. Starting the year strong, YEPP had the pleasure of visiting the National Parliament, where we had the privilege of meeting with Ricardo Carvalho, Member of Parliament and Deputy Secretary General of Partido Social Democrata (PSD, EPP). The Board engaged in an informal discussion with him as well as with José Pedro Aguiar Branco, President of the National Parliament.

The YEPP Board also met with Pedro Duarte, Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and a proud former YEPP member. This excep-

tional opportunity allowed us to exchange ideas and share insights about the political situations in our respective countries.

Another highlight of our trip was the visit to the National Palace of Belém, where we had the honor of meeting with Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, President of the Republic of Portugal. During our engaging conversation, he emphasized the critical importance of safeguarding democracy and working towards a united, stronger Europe.

We concluded this memorable weekend by hosting our Board Meeting at the Partido Social Democrata headquarters, where we reflected on our discussions and set the course for YEPP activities of the year.



Past Events

YEPP Seminar “Perspectives on the New U.S. Administration”

The YEPP seminar titled Perspectives on the New U.S. Administration, held online on 15 January 2025, provided an engaging platform to discuss the potential implications of a Trump presidency on global and transatlantic relations. Moderated by Lídia Pereira, President of YEPP and Vice President of the EPP Group in the European Parliament, the seminar featured insightful contributions from two distinguished speakers: Penelope Naas, a global public policy expert with a focus on geopolitics, trade, and climate, and Bruce Stokes, Director of Global Economic Attitudes at the Pew Research Center.

Bruce Stokes provided a detailed overview of American public opinion regarding Trump’s return to power. He highlighted a divergence between Trump’s public approval ratings and the perception of his effectiveness on key issues. While many Americans believe he could address unemployment and immigration challenges, there is widespread skepticism about his ability to strengthen international partnerships, improve education, or expand healthcare access. Stokes pointed to the polarising nature of Trump’s policies, noting that while many in the U.S. and Europe view his presidency critically, his strong stance on China and Ukraine aligns with the sentiments of a significant segment of the American population. He also underscored a growing perception in the U.S. that Europe must take greater responsibility for global challenges, reflecting a recalibration in transatlantic expectations.



Penelope Naas

Expert in global public policy, geopolitics, trade, and climate

Penelope Naas explored the geopolitical and economic ramifications of Trump’s potential policy directions. She predicted the resurgence of tariffs and economic measures framed around national emergencies, along with intensified U.S.-China tensions. Naas stressed the importance of managing technological and digital policy convergence between the U.S. and Europe. On climate change, she noted Trump’s skepticism and its implications for international negotiations, highlighting the geopolitical significance of emerging territories like Greenland in global warming debates. Naas emphasised that Trump’s worldview, centred on fairness and reciprocity, often fosters an “America first” approach that could reshape global alliances.

The seminar concluded with a dynamic Q&A session where participants delved into diverse topics, including the challenges of



Bruce Stokes

Authority on public opinion, foreign policy, and global economic trends

Trump’s coalition politics, the influence of prominent figures like Elon Musk in global affairs, and the perception of U.S.-Europe relations. Both speakers underscored the need for Europe to define its strategic priorities independently while navigating an evolving geopolitical landscape.



Get to Know: Junge ÖVP, Austria

The Youth of the Austrian People's Party (Junge ÖVP Österreich, JVP) was established in 1945, shortly after the end of the Second World War, and is one of six organizations within the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP). With more than 100,000 members, Junge ÖVP is the biggest political youth organization of the country and is highly active across all nine regions of Austria and in numerous municipalities. It is not only a political youth organization, but also a lifestyle, as many of its active members are deeply connected to the party's values and are involved in civil service in their local communities.

Structure and policies

Junge ÖVP formally consists of a national organization, nine regional organizations, and numerous municipal and district organizations throughout Austria. Its members are represented not only in most Austrian municipal and regional councils but also in the Austrian Parliament, where seven deputies are direct members of Junge ÖVP. Additionally, several JVP members serve in regional parliaments.

Junge ÖVP has played a crucial role in the Austrian government over the past two decades. Notably, Sebastian Kurz served as the youngest State Secretary for Integration in Austrian history and later as Minister of Foreign Affairs and Chancellor of the Republic. After stepping down, the current President of Junge ÖVP, Claudia Plakolm, became a member of the government, serving as State Secretary for Youth, Civilian Service, and Digitalization.

Since the parliamentary elections in September 2024, Claudia has been one of five main members of the ÖVP team negotiating a new coalition government.

During Claudia's tenure in government, several laws have been enacted that reflect Junge ÖVP's policies and values. These include the provision of free HPV vaccines for young people under 30, reduced costs for young people purchasing their first home, the establishment of a nursing apprenticeship, the digitalization of the driving license and other official documents, among other achievements in recent years.



Die Junge ÖVP.

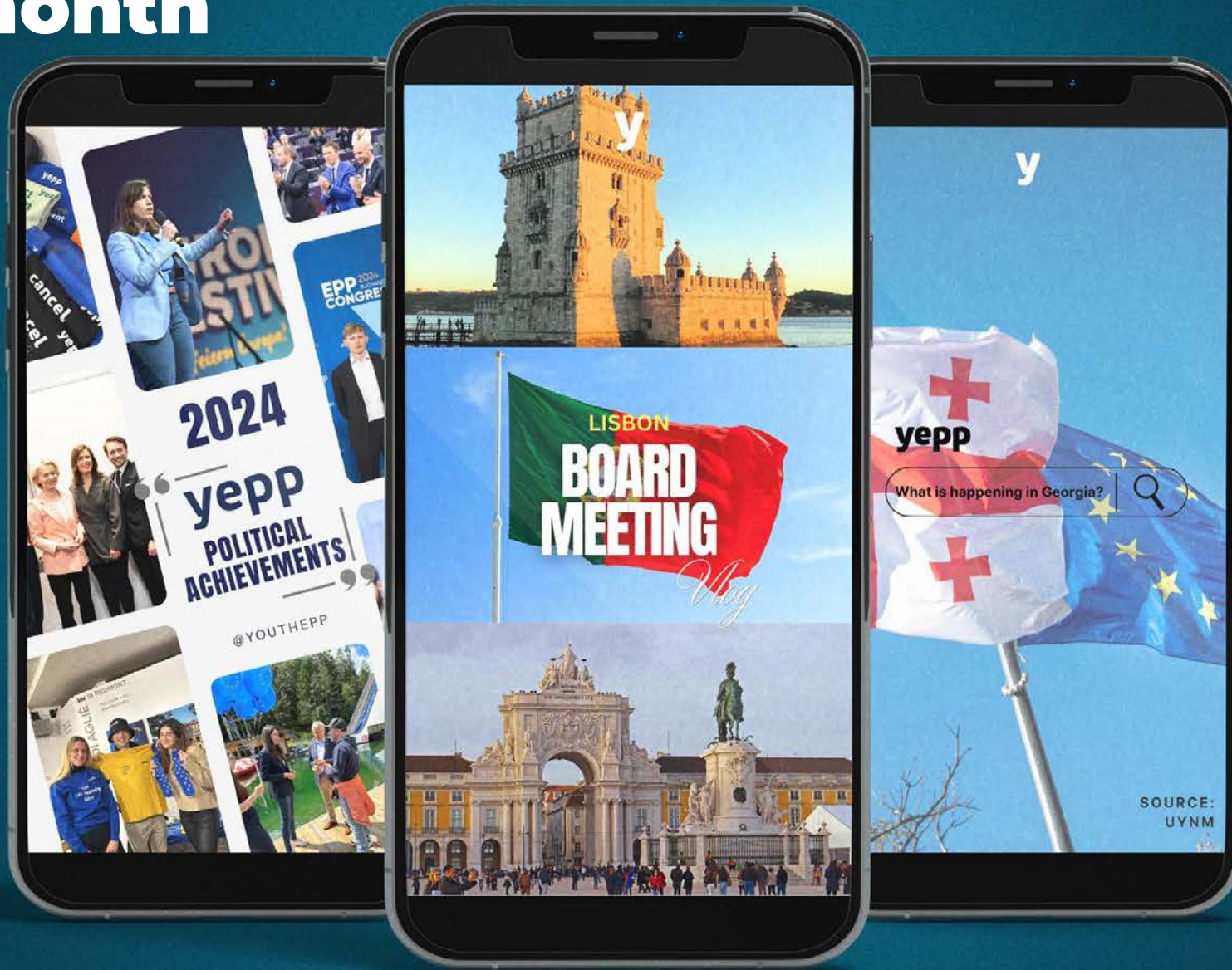
Junge ÖVP – the “Europe Party”

In 1994, Junge ÖVP was the first and later one of the most vocal advocates for Austria's accession to the EU. Othmar Karas, then President of JVP and later an MEP and First Vice President of the European Parliament, played a key role alongside Austrian Minister of Foreign Affairs Alois Mock in advocating for a united Europe. Following the 1994 referendum, in which 66.58% of the population voted in favour of joining the EU, Austria officially became a member on 1 January 1995. Since then, ÖVP has consistently identified itself as Austria's “Europe Party,” a stance that remains unchanged today.

Junge ÖVP has always been a pro-European driving force within the party. Today, this is reflected in its strong representation in the European Parliament, with MEPs Sophia Kircher, who also serves as First Vice President of YEPP, and Alexander Bernhuber holding two of the five ÖVP delegation mandates.

By Julia Heinrich and Michael Stellwag

Reels of the month



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YEPP in the Future

YEPP Conference in Rabat, Morocco

We are excited to announce that the **upcoming YEPP Conference will take place in Rabat, Morocco, from 30th January to 2nd February**, hosted by National Rally of Independents (RNI).

This conference will provide a unique platform for delegates from our network of more than 60 organizations to explore and exchange ideas on the future of energy, climate action, and regional cooperation. With a special focus on youth involvement, we aim to foster collaboration between European and Mediterranean countries, ensuring that young voices play a central role in shaping future policies and strategies.

Moroccan leaders and experts will contribute to the dialogue, offering insights into the region's approach to these challenges. This event promises to be an important step in strengthening connections and partnerships across the Mediterranean, driving forward shared solutions to the pressing issues we face today.

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