



# RESILIENCE

**The future of Europe as seen by EU citizens**

**#OURFUTURES**

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JRC143071

EUR 40423

PDF ISBN 978-92-68-31086-1 ISSN 1831-9424 doi:10.2760/8495633 KJ-01-25-423-EN-N

Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2025

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How to cite this report: Bol, E., Goran, P., Deprez, S. and van Gool Maldonado, C., *Resilience: The future of Europe as seen by EU citizens*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2025, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/8495633>, JRC143071.

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The future of Europe as seen by EU citizens

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## Technical report

This report is part of a series of reports published in the context of **#OurFutures**. #OurFutures is a collection of stories from EU citizens describing their desirable futures. The stories are collected in an [open-data base](#) designed by the [Policy Lab: Foresight, Design & Behavioural Insights](#) of the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission. The project supports and inspires a collective dialogue about the future of Europe and its visions for the future.



Analysis is supported by [Voices that Count](#) ; May 2025

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## Abstract

This report presents an analysis on the topic of resilience of the stories selected from the #OurFutures initiative. These stories — envisioning life in 2040 — provide unique insights into how people across the EU perceive Europe's capacity to remain resilient amid multiple transformative challenges.

This thematic analysis supports the European Commission's 2025 Strategic Foresight Report on resilience. It therefore focuses on stories that explicitly reference the role and position of Europe, its institutions, and its collective future.

The report identifies eight major **challenge areas** shaping perceptions of Europe's resilience, with climate and democracy emerging as particularly cross-cutting themes. The analysis also explores the **optimistic and pessimistic visions** citizens express about Europe's future – on the one hand those describing a Europe that has responded to its challenges through transformation, and on the other, those that foresee institutional collapse, authoritarian drift, climate catastrophe, and social fragmentation. Five **key tensions** structure the debates within the stories, revealing the difficult trade-offs that Europe must navigate to remain resilient. **Potential shocks** that citizens anticipate underscore where citizens feel Europe is most vulnerable and where resilience must be strengthened.

Despite their concerns, storytellers propose a wide range of **concrete strategies** to enhance European resilience, many of them emphasizing systemic reform and long-term thinking. The report synthesizes citizens' views on **Europe's role in the world**.

## 1. Introduction to #OurFutures

What do you want the future to look like? In which future would you like to live? These questions, of high relevance for policy, were at the heart of the Conference on the Future of Europe that ended in May 2022. The Conference created a new space for debate with citizens on how to respond to the European Union's challenges and to create the Union that its citizens collectively want for the future. However, beyond the formulation of many individual wishes for the future, there is a need to structure and make sense of such conversations with citizens in order to help build coherent, desirable policy objectives. Being able to showcase these possible futures and how coherent they can be with new and ongoing policy initiatives can then provide a meaningful and constructive space for political debate in the EU with a long-term perspective.

The **#OurFutures - Stories for the future of Europe** initiative addresses this permanent need for long-term perspectives beyond the end of the Conference on the Future of Europe. It offers a simple questionnaire through an interactive multilingual platform able to cater to the 24 official languages of the European Union. It aims at collecting a large number of very short stories that express what participants would like to see in the Europe of the future (2040), with their hopes, their uncertainties and their ideas for a positive future. These stories, written by Europeans from all walks of life, remain anonymous. To ensure the capacity to make sense of this input, the project relies on a robust methodology (powered by SenseMaker®) to exploit, in a foresight perspective, the rich material provided by participants.

This methodology operates in all EU languages to maximize reach. To avoid any bias, the analysis bases itself strictly on what the authors of the stories themselves tell by answering a few simple questions. These stories, also translated into English, are published on the [Futures4Europe.eu](https://www.futures4europe.eu)<sup>1</sup> platform. This makes it possible to maintain the connection with the interested participants as a group and to stimulate discussions.

#OurFutures is an open-ended project that will remain active for many years to collect as many stories as possible and monitor possible shifts in the visions and desires that participants express. Results can be analysed per country, per age group, per policy domain or other categories. The analyses can also correlate several parameters to check whether certain values or preferences occur in specific combinations.

The objective of this report is to illustrate what citizens' future-oriented stories reveal about their hopes for a resilient society and highlight the key themes and dimensions that shape their visions. The insights that they provide can serve to generate concrete, future-oriented recommendations for EU action to build together the European Union that its citizens want.

The purpose of this initiative is to provide a novel tool to empower all Europeans to have their say and influence the creation of their own collective future and to inspire policymakers to orient their action to build a future that EU citizens can support. It does so by providing concrete ideas about desired futures in the form of structured material that can be analysed to feed constructively the political debate. This report illustrates how the material collected through #OurFutures can be used to make sense of current EU policy initiatives.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.futures4europe.eu/ourfutures>

## 2. Methodology

The data reported here results from the collection of future stories written by people living in the EU using the narrative inquiry method. This method allows for the large-scale capture of ideas for the future through a quantitative framework allowing the participants to become their own ethnographer. It combines the capacity to deal with large numbers of inputs with the explanatory power of narrative.

The contributions from the citizens were harvested both at the occasion of future related events and workshops, and through personal, social media and direct mail campaigns.

The harvesting tool developed to make sense of #OurFutures stories organises the collected input into 4 sections:

1. Collection of future images: the tool prompts participants to write a story about 2040.
2. A set of follow-up questions that give additional insights about the stories: thematic area, geographical perspective, feelings, sense of who has agency.
3. Collection of general views towards the future.
4. Collection of demographic information: gender, age, country, employment status, financial security.

Answers are mandatory and participation anonymous. The data presented here were mostly collected during the period June 2021 to March 2025 (more than 4000 stories).

Participants were asked to describe stories of the future in 2040 and provide additional information such as the feelings related to these stories or their geographical focus. The 2040-time horizon was selected both to give people the mental space to consider large enough possible changes and to remain in a close enough future (less than 20 years) so that most would consider that they would still be around to experience that future.

To avoid any experimental or methodological bias, the analyses of the data are based strictly on what the participants themselves tell through their answers to a few additional questions. In other words, the citizens themselves, after describing a future story, interpret their own stories and provide their own associated feelings.

Most of the future stories described are associated with issues of global interest. Only a small fraction relates to issues of European, national or local scope.

The texts from the stories presented below were extracted directly from the #OurFutures database but were sometimes edited for clarity.

All data and demographic information are available at: <https://ourfutures.dashboard.voicesthatcount.net/>

### 3. Resilience in the #OurFutures stories

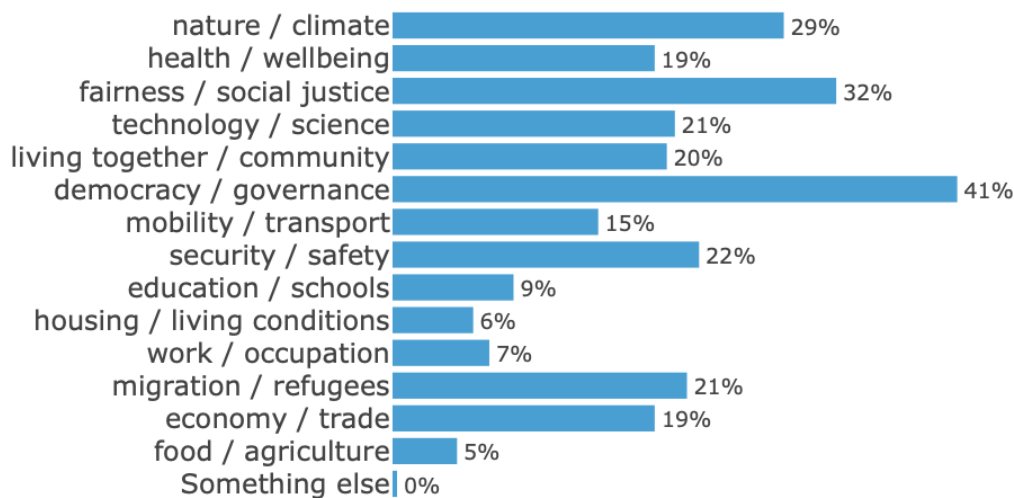
The topic of resilience is in the focus of the European Commission's 2025 Strategic Foresight Report. To inspire and complement the Report with the citizens' ideas and points of view, this analysis was done to explore how people in the EU see different aspects of resilience in their stories about the future. Resilience is seen as the ability for Europe to not only be able to bounce back from crises and adversity, but to transform and bounce forward, in a sustainable, fair and democratic manner<sup>2</sup>.

With the focus on resilience in Europe, this #OurFutures analysis looks specifically at stories that talk of Europe's position or the role and/or capacities of the EU (chapters 4-6) and also those that look at future shocks and possible response strategies (chapters 7-8).

There are **340 stories** (8.5%) among all the collected #OurFutures stories that explicitly refer to the role and position of Europe and/or explicitly mention EU Institutions. The majority of these stories come from people between 26 and 65 years old (66%). 14% of the stories are shared by people up to 25 years old and 19% from people older than 65 years old. Among these stories, there is an equal number of stories from South Europe, East Europe and Central Europe and less stories from Northern Europe.

The themes that are most present in this set of 340 stories are democracy/governance (41%), fairness/social justice (32%) and nature/climate (29%). Other important topics (average 20%) are security/safety, migration/refugees, technology/science, living together/community, health/well-being and economy/trade.

**Figure 1:** Share (in %) of the selected 340 stories for each core theme



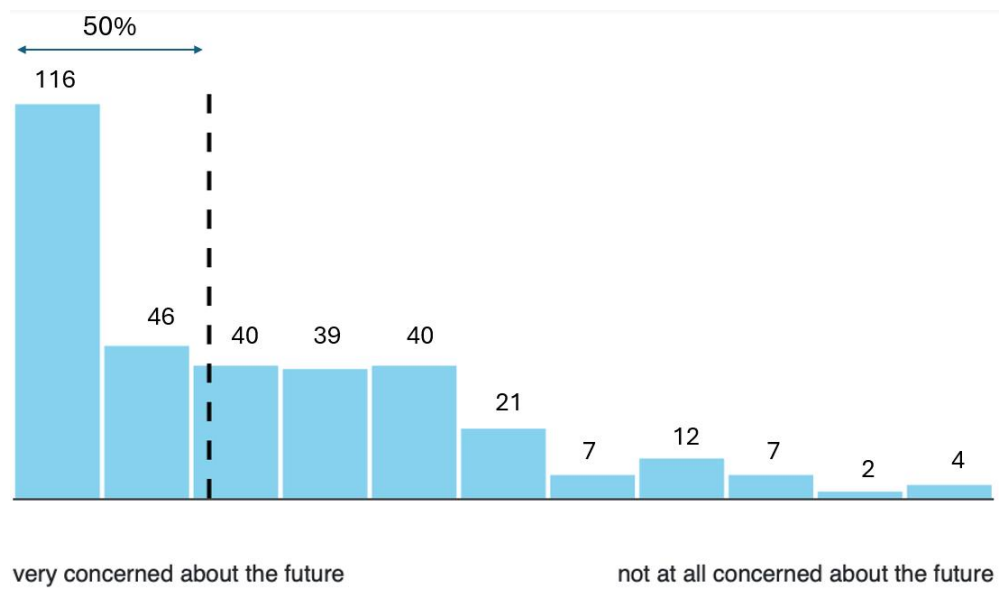
Source: Own analysis

Among these stories, the majority of storytellers indicate that they are concerned about the future. They also seem to indicate that they (citizens) can do a lot to create their desired future.

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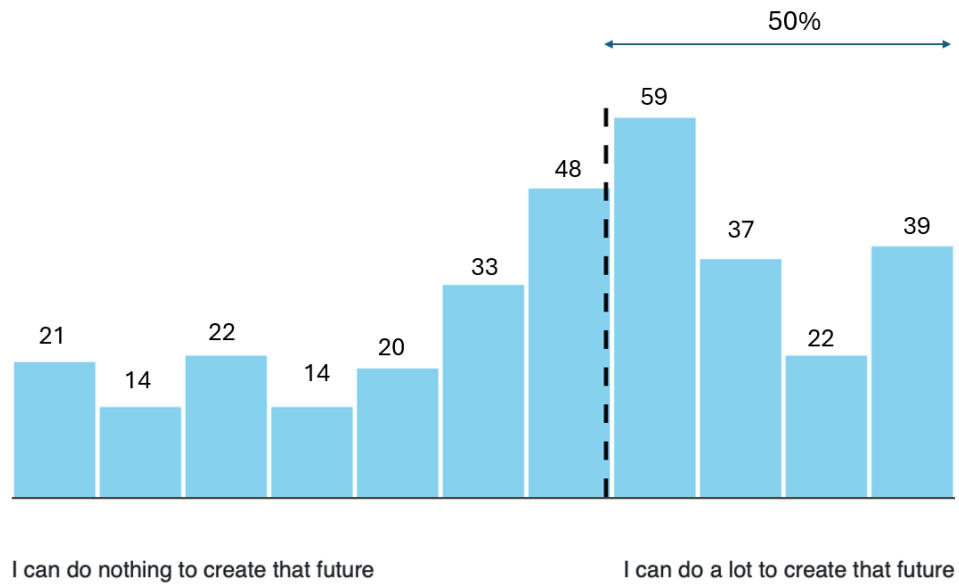
<sup>2</sup> European Commission, *Strategic Foresight Report*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2025, *forthcoming*

**Figure 2:** Histogram reflecting people's concern about the future (total number of respondents: 337)



Source: Own analysis

**Figure 3:** Histogram reflecting whether people think they can do something to create the future they shared (total number of respondents: 329)



Source: Own analysis

## 4. The main challenges for the future of Europe

Across all the 340 stories we see some **common challenges** that are related to the future of Europe (presented here starting with the ones mentioned by the largest number of stories):

### 4.1. Security threats and defence issues

The stories reveal deep anxiety about Europe's security situation, primarily triggered by Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Key concerns include military dependence on the US, fragmented defence capabilities, and vulnerability to hybrid warfare. Stories from Central and Eastern Europe particularly emphasize the immediate threat from Russia, while Western European narratives focus more on strategic autonomy. The challenge is not just military but includes cybersecurity, energy security, and the need to protect critical infrastructure.



*"The EU supported Ukraine throughout the war, until Russia lost... Ukraine is now a full member of both NATO and the European Union, as one of its strongest militaries and fastest growing economies.*

*"For many years Europe has had to rely on the USA for security and defence. Now we must develop our own strong military force to protect our borders and values.*

*"The external borders are strictly guarded ..."*

### 4.2. Democratic decline and institutional trust

A pervasive concern about the weakening of democratic values and institutions emerges across the stories. Participants worry about rising authoritarianism, both within and outside the EU, declining trust in traditional institutions, and the gap between citizens and EU decision-makers. The challenge of maintaining democratic values while addressing security threats and economic pressures is frequently highlighted. Many stories express concern about bureaucratic overreach and the need for more transparent, accountable governance.



*"The trust in our institutions has never been lower. We need to rebuild confidence through transparency and accountability at all levels of governance."*

*"Harsh penalties were imposed and carried out for intentional cancellation of agreements on climate, biodiversity and human rights."*

*"Politicians who made missteps consistently lose their immunity and are held accountable. Also punishable with possible prison time."*

### 4.3. Migration and social cohesion

Stories reflect divisions over migration and integration. Concerns range from border security and illegal immigration to failed integration and cultural tensions. Many stories express anxiety about preserving national and local identities while adapting to increasing diversity. The challenge of developing effective, humane migration policies while maintaining social cohesion and addressing security concerns is a recurring theme.



*"How will we maintain our social fabric with such rapid demographic changes? Integration is failing and communities are growing apart instead of together."*

*"Immigration emerges as one of the most divisive topics threatening the unity of our society. We need to find a balanced approach."*

*"Migration has led to many political problems and disputes within our EU in recent years and inhumane measures have been strongly criticized."*

### 4.4. Climate crisis and environmental degradation

Environmental challenges feature prominently, with concerns about climate change impacts, biodiversity loss, and pollution. Stories highlight the tension between environmental action and economic interests, the social costs of the green transition, and the challenge of achieving climate goals while maintaining competitiveness. Many express anxieties about the pace and scale of environmental change and the adequacy of current responses.



*"Droughts, the rising of sea levels and forests fires will have a major impact on the world's GDP. This is why the United Nations will decide to suggest an overhaul of its climate governance."*

*"The climate disaster has been averted and people are more important than companies. Wealth is being distributed more equally."*

*"Climate change has consequences, especially in southern areas, where people are gradually migrating north."*

### 4.5. Economic inequality and instability

Stories reflect deep concern about growing economic disparities, both within and between EU countries. Key challenges include inflation, job insecurity, housing affordability, and the impact of technological change on employment. Many stories highlight the tension between economic growth and social justice, and the challenge of maintaining European social models in a competitive global economy.



*"The gap between rich and poor has become unbearable. Young people can't afford housing, while others accumulate vast wealth."*

*"It is not surprising that the birth rate is declining in the EU and the world, if young families do not have the basic conditions for creating families."*

#### 4.6. Technological disruption and digital divide

While technology is often seen as a solution, many stories express concern about its disruptive impacts. Key challenges include job displacement by automation, digital privacy and surveillance, cyber threats, and the growing power of tech companies. The digital divide between regions, generations, and social groups is frequently highlighted as a critical challenge.



*"Many traditional jobs will disappear through automation. We must prepare our workforce for this radical transformation."*

*"The digital divide between generations and regions is creating new forms of social exclusion."*

*"The question that arises here is whether AI and automation will create more problems than they solve in terms of employment and social stability."*

#### 4.7. Aging population and social welfare

Stories reflect anxiety about the sustainability of European social models in the face of demographic change. Key challenges include pension systems, healthcare costs, labour shortages, and intergenerational fairness. The tension between maintaining comprehensive social protection and economic competitiveness is a recurring theme.



*"The pension money has already been spent because of the intergenerational contract, I just have to hope that a few people will still be able to finance my pension."*

*"Because of how most things are managed, questions of human identity will begin to arise as our population ages and fewer workers support more retirees."*

*"In order for the generational contract to work, every citizen needs 3-4 children. This means that every woman would have to give birth to between 6 and 8 children."*

#### 4.8. Global power shifts and strategic autonomy

Many stories express concern about Europe's position in a changing global order. Key challenges include dependence on external powers (particularly the US and China), economic competitiveness, technological sovereignty, and the ability to defend European interests and values. The need to develop strategic autonomy while maintaining beneficial international partnerships is frequently highlighted.



*"Europe must become independent from Chinese technology and American military protection to defend its own interests."*

*"The EU needs to be ready to face the next challenges of the coming decades, in a multipolar international system with an ongoing change of the distribution of power."*

*"Europe's relationships with global powers like the US, China, and Russia will be important. Changes in alliances, trade agreements, and defence strategies will shape Europe's role in global affairs."*

All these challenges are strongly intertwined and influence each other. The stories suggest that positive future developments require an integrated approach considering all dimensions. Notably, despite different views on specific themes, there is broad [consensus](#) on the **need for European cooperation** in addressing major challenges.

## 5. The optimistic and pessimistic view on Europe's future

The 340 stories about Europe's future reveal sharply contrasting visions, ranging from profound optimism to deep pessimism.

### 5.1. Optimistic view on Europe's future

The **optimistic narratives** envision a Europe that has successfully transformed its greatest challenges into opportunities. In these visions, European integration has reached new heights, with a fully functioning democratic federation that maintains both unity and diversity. Political decision-making has become more transparent and participatory, with citizens directly engaged through digital platforms while maintaining traditional democratic values. This stronger Europe has emerged as a respected global power, capable of standing up to other world powers while promoting peace and democratic values worldwide.

These optimistic accounts describe an economic transformation where technological advancement serves social progress. Universal basic income has become standard, while automation has eliminated tedious work without creating unemployment. European companies lead in sustainable technologies, competing successfully with American and Chinese firms. The economy has shifted from pure economic growth to valuing well-being, creating prosperity while respecting environmental limits.

The social fabric in these positive visions has strengthened through successful integration policies and cultural exchange. Education has become truly accessible, with multilingual learning and cultural understanding at its core. Healthcare systems have been revolutionized by new technologies while remaining universally accessible. Cities have transformed into green, sustainable communities where technology enhances rather than replaces human connection.

Perhaps most strikingly, these optimistic stories see Europe achieving its ambitious environmental goals. Cities have become self-sustaining ecosystems, powered by renewable energy and designed for both human well-being and biodiversity. Climate change has been brought under control through a combination of technological innovation and social transformation. Nature has been restored in many areas, with wildlife returning to rewilded spaces.

### 5.2. Pessimistic view on Europe's future

The **pessimistic visions** describe a Europe that has collapsed under the weight of its contradictions. These narratives see the European Union dissolving, unable to manage the combined pressures of climate crisis, migration, and economic decline. Political fragmentation has led to the rise of authoritarian leaders, with democracy weakening across the continent. National interests have trumped cooperation, leading to conflicts over resources and influence.

These darker visions describe economic collapse triggered by failed policies and external competition. Mass unemployment has resulted from rapid automation without adequate social protection. Europe has lost the technological race to China and America, becoming increasingly irrelevant in the global economy. Inequality has reached unprecedented levels, creating social tensions and political instability.

The pessimistic stories paint a picture of complete social disintegration. Integration policies have failed utterly, creating parallel societies with minimal interaction. Traditional values have eroded without being replaced by new forms of social cohesion. Education systems have broken down under financial pressure and social disruption, creating a lost generation without prospects or hope.

Environmental catastrophe features prominently in these negative visions. Climate change has accelerated beyond control, making parts of southern Europe uninhabitable during summer months. Failed green policies have led to economic decline without achieving environmental goals. Resource scarcity has triggered conflicts, while biodiversity has collapsed despite conservation efforts.

### 5.3. About positive and negative visions

**Regional patterns** emerge clearly in these visions. Central and Eastern European stories tend to emphasize security concerns and the relationship with Russia. Southern European narratives focus more on economic challenges and climate impacts. Northern European accounts often highlight environmental leadership and social innovation, while Western European stories frequently address technological transformation and cultural integration.

What unifies these diverse visions, whether optimistic or pessimistic, is their **recognition of Europe's current moment as historically decisive**. Success requires balancing seemingly contradictory goals: unity with diversity, economic growth with sustainability, innovation with tradition, openness with security. Yet even in their differences, these stories share a common appreciation for what's at stake: the future of a unique political project that attempts to unite diverse peoples and traditions in pursuit of common goals and values.

## 6. Five main tension areas

In the 340 stories, five main tension areas were observed:

### 6.1. Integration versus autonomy

The future of European cooperation divides opinions sharply. One share of participants wants a more united Europe with shared policies on foreign affairs, defence, and economy. They believe only a strong, unified Europe can tackle today's challenges and compete globally. In contrast, a number of participants want to protect national independence and cultural differences. They think Brussels already has too much power and prefer a looser partnership focused mainly on trade. They argue that countries should make most decisions for themselves. This basic disagreement affects almost every aspect of Europe's future.

### 6.2. Protected versus open borders

Immigration creates strong debates about Europe's future. Those wanting stricter border control worry about security, protecting local cultures, and maintaining social systems. They think too much immigration too quickly causes problems for society. Others support welcoming more immigrants, pointing to economic benefits and Europe's humanitarian values. They see immigration as making Europe stronger and more diverse. This split reflects different views about what kind of society Europe should be.

### 6.3. Environmental action versus economic growth

How to handle climate change divides opinions. Environmental supporters want quick, big changes to stop climate change, saying we can't wait and that green technology will create new jobs. They want Europe to lead the world in fighting climate change. Others worry these changes will hurt the economy, cost jobs, and make life more expensive for ordinary people. They want slower changes that protect existing jobs and industries. This debate affects many aspects of Europe's future economy.

### 6.4. Technological progress versus human values

People disagree about how much technology should shape our future. Technology supporters welcome AI, robots, and digital solutions to make life better and solve problems. They think Europe needs to embrace technology to stay competitive. Critics worry about job losses, privacy, and losing human connections. They want to be more careful about new technology and make sure it helps rather than harms society. This tension is reflected in issues from education to healthcare.

### 6.5. Global engagement versus strategic independence

How Europe should deal with other world powers is also a matter of disagreement. Some want to maintain strong partnerships with countries like the US and China, saying Europe needs these relationships to prosper. They think Europe can't succeed alone in today's world. Others want Europe to be more independent, especially in defence, technology, and energy. They believe Europe should be able to stand up for itself without relying on others.

## 7. Potential shocks reflected in the stories

For an identification of the potential shocks affecting Europe, we enlarged the story data of 340 stories, which explicitly refer to role and position of Europe, with additional 899 future stories in which people specifically indicate developments that make them worried about the future.

The table below provides an overview of the observed potential shocks for Europe. We took into account any **sudden, disruptive event** that has **high impact** and typically **low predictability**, which challenges the stability of existing systems (economic, political, social, technological, environmental, etc.).

**Table 1.** Potential shocks with quotes from citizens' stories

Type of shock	Nature of shock	Quotes
Nature / Climate	Extreme climate disasters such as heatwaves, hurricanes, floods and droughts resulting in unsafe living spaces due to extreme heat, pollution, or ecosystem collapse.	<p><i>"Last year, 2039, we even had 43 days over 40 degrees. That was a new high..."</i></p> <p><i>"Terrible heat waves occur especially in summer in southern Europe, where I live with my wife. The so-called once-in-a-century floods have become the norm."</i></p>
Nature / Climate	Drastic melting of polar ice leading to sudden rising sea-levels, causing loss of land, forced migration, and ecological damage.	<p><i>"The glaciers and continental ice are melting from below, the ocean is also warming from below... life on earth has become unbearable, there will be a great migration of people."</i></p> <p><i>"In the last two years, from north to south, hundreds of thousands of people have lost everything: with the rise of sea levels, their homes have been gradually invaded by water."</i></p>
Nature / Climate	Passing critical climate thresholds that trigger unstoppable environmental change such as forest dieback, wildlife extinction, loss of biodiversity and natural balances	<p><i>"There is a severe danger of extinction of plant and animal species and we must act now by initiating and maintaining practices that will help conserve nature, maintain biodiversity and diminish the consequences of industrialisation, pollution and energy consumption."</i></p> <p><i>"Some animal species have disappeared, unfortunately. ...."</i></p>
Nature / Climate	Shortage of freshwater due to drought or overuse	<p><i>"Water continues to occupy us. Many countries already have a water shortage."</i></p> <p><i>"Drinking water began to disappear. This leads to population migration to places where there is still enough water."</i></p>
Health	New severe pandemics or contagious disease outbreaks, undermining	<i>"Various viruses and parasites have appeared that destroy a large part of living beings."</i>

	public health systems and reshaping daily life.	<i>"Furthermore, climate change also favours the spread of new diseases such as the covid-19 pandemic we have just experienced, which will have to continue to be tackled in the near future."</i>
Health	Collapse or severe dysfunction of the healthcare systems, with long waiting lists, insufficient staff, and unmet medical needs.	<i>"I would like the health system to WORK—not to work better, but just to work, because although money is deducted monthly for so-called state health insurance, in reality most people are treated with semi-indifference, they are put on endless waiting lists when sometimes it is urgent to intervene in some way and almost always you are either put in a situation to humiliate yourself or accept humiliation, or to go to private practice where the costs are very high and continue to increase."</i>  <i>"We must be healthy or die quickly because there will be no one to take care of us."</i>
Democracy / Governance	Democratic breakdown and collapse in powerful EU countries with the rise of authoritarian regimes that undermine or dismantle justice system, civil rights and institutions	<i>"To do this, put an end to dictatorships, the desire to conquer territories, to the power and domination of material, to live in peaceful communities using our intelligence."</i>  <i>"How did we end up with the far-right governments that we so rejected 80 years ago and even 30 years ago? What happened to the world? What happened to everyone's critical thinking? Where are the democracies of 30 years ago and why are countries becoming dictatorships again?"</i>
Democracy / Governance	Collapse or dissolution of the European Union	<i>"The EU was dissolved. The national states live and act independently again."</i>  <i>"In 2027 the European Union disintegrated, the squalid political and economic games to the detriment of many member countries and in favour of a few others came to an end."</i>
Democracy / Governance	The EU transformation into federal state	<i>"I hope that in the 2040s, the current EU will become a federal state (EFV) with one army, one command, well-armed and become the main force in NATO."</i>  <i>"I would like a federal Europe, and that people could acquire European nationality."</i>  <i>"In the year 2050, I would like Europe to be a federal state .. for it to integrate all the nations that make up Europe [...] The President of Europe should be elected by direct election among all the inhabitants of Europe, as well as the Parliament [...]"</i>
Democracy / Governance	The UK return to EU	<i>"The United Kingdom held a new referendum in 2026, where the people decided to rejoin the EU. This became a reality in 2029."</i>  <i>"Now that there are over 40 countries in the EU and it is over 10 years since the UK rejoined..."</i>

Democracy / Governance	Trump's re-election leading to a US autocracy	<i>"The United States squandered this position with Trump's re-election and veered towards autocracy, which by 2040 has become complete."</i>
Security / Safety	War or military conflict in Europe including invasions and the threat of a nuclear war	<i>"In 2026, Russia attacks Poland. The European Union protests. NATO ponders the matter and finally decides to respond to the attack militarily. A European war begins. Finland defends itself with the help of the Swedish air force and navy. It is the year 2030 and wars are at a standstill."</i>  <i>"The great war in Central Europe finally ended. Minor conflicts still continue... Russia succeeded in conquering lands up to Germany, which occupied its former lands in Poland..."</i>
Security / Safety	Putin's sudden death triggering Russian collapse/civil war	<i>"Russia went bankrupt due to the protracted war in Ukraine, and after Putin's death in 2028, a civil war began in Russia, which continues to this day."</i>  <i>"Putin will die under unknown circumstances, his associates will be tried at the Hague Court, Russia will pay reparations money and compensate the damages caused to Ukraine..."</i>
Security / Safety	Collapse of the NATO	<i>"NATO was abolished by the old USA, so we protect ourselves now and we as a power factor join together in the front against the evil that occasionally appears around the world."</i>  <i>"Everything got out of control due to the EU bureaucracy and the incompetence of NATO after the withdrawal of the US from the alliance."</i>
Security / Safety	Large-scale cyber-attacks crippling EU infrastructure affecting economy, basic infrastructures, transport and daily life	<i>"A big cyberattack in 2027 brought down the digital infrastructure in several European countries for weeks. Banks, energy systems, hospitals all went dark. It took almost a year to rebuild trust and infrastructure."</i>
Security / Safety	Collapse of governance or Law and Order, the breakdown of national governance, where territories are ruled by criminal groups in lawless condition	<i>"There is a shoot-to-kill order at the external borders of the European Union. Huge social upheavals cause internal unrest and violence."</i>  <i>"In some parts of Europe, the national governments no longer hold power. Armed groups, militias and even cartels control entire regions, making their own laws."</i>  <i>"There are lawless zones in several EU countries. Police don't go there. People are left to fend for themselves. These areas are effectively ruled by gangs."</i>
Information / Media	Manipulation or erosion of truth and facts leading to widespread misinformation, loss of factual discourse, and manipulation of media	<i>"The brainwashing of people is already quite far, but maybe there are still decision-makers whose heads have not yet been completely confused by this current 'freedom of speech' grimace."</i>  <i>"Daily limits on social media has helped manage misinformation and echo chambers."</i>

Technology / Science	Rapid AI rise replacing human workers at scale leading to massive unemployment, economic insecurity and societal inequality.	<p><i>"In 2035, the big shift came. Artificial Intelligence, powered by advancements in quantum computing, reached a level of sophistication that made many traditional jobs obsolete. While the transition was difficult for some, the European Union implemented universal basic income (UBI) and retraining programs..."</i></p> <p><i>"Due to artificial intelligence, industry will be largely automated. As a result, mass protests over job losses will follow."</i></p>
Technology / Science	Sudden rise of AI self-governed systems such as key infrastructure, robots or weapons	<p><i>"I start my day in a smart home, where artificial intelligence adjusts the temperature, suggests breakfast based on her dietary needs, and books a self-driving hydrogen taxi for her commute. [...] At the restaurant, robot chefs prepare a meal from local, lab-grown ingredients."</i></p> <p><i>The meeting was devoted to the new law on the rights of humanoid robots — an issue that was now as important as human rights."</i></p>
Technology / Science	Massive rise of AI, virtual spaces and social media leading to disruption so human relationships, increasing isolation and emotional disconnection.	<p><i>"People were under the spell of technology, immersed into virtual worlds, virtual networks, virtual communication. [...] It took some years for people to realise what they were missing and what they were searching – closeness with others, with nature, with themselves, without the interference of technology, material goods, virtual realities."</i></p> <p><i>"After work, Pavel returned home and decided to visit his friends in the virtual park. These parks were created using advanced virtual reality, allowing people to meet and relax in a virtual environment that was directly connected to their real senses."</i></p>
Technology / Science	Mass surveillance and the loss of personal privacy due to permanent pervasive digital monitoring systems.	<p><i>"That's why I would restrict the rights of every single citizen and create a comprehensive database in which DNA and an encrypted numerical code are stored immediately after birth."</i></p> <p><i>"For me personally, a chip that everyone gets implanted would be a conceivable way to determine who was at the crime scene at the time of the crime."</i></p> <p><i>"The cities had secure infrastructures, protected by autonomous systems that prevented cyberattacks and physical threats through non-intrusive surveillance drones."</i></p>
Technology / Science	Sudden breakthrough of nuclear fusion changing the energy landscape	<p><i>"Energy has really become cheaper! Clean nuclear fusion power plants can produce electricity cheaply and safely. Cheap electricity means that electric cars with newer battery technologies are finally an answer to mobility problems."</i></p> <p><i>"...a nuclear fusion reactor small and powerful enough to provide a city with energy..."</i></p>

Economy / Trade	Collapse of financial or economic systems in Europe, leading to widespread hunger, conflict, and lawlessness.	<i>"With Germany's economic collapse in 2027 and the resulting exit from the economic union, France and Italy were unable to stem the polarized political developments that split European unity. [...]"</i>
Mobility / Transport	Ban on fossil fuel vehicles	<i>"The EU completed the transition to 100% sustainable transport. Now, electric flying cars and ultra-fast mass transit systems have made cities quieter and greener."</i>  <i>"Electric cars, hydrogen or battery-powered public transport and smart infrastructure would enable minimal CO<sub>2</sub> emissions .... Electric cars are the norm, and sustainable mobility is accessible to all."</i>
Migration / Refugees	Abrupt mass migration crisis triggering instability and a threat to internal order and identity.	<i>"Migrations will increase, which will increase political tensions, discontent among Europeans, violence..."</i>  <i>"Migration causes unrest in society, fear of local people, acts of terrorism."</i>  <i>"Europe has been flooded by crowds of people who ignore European values, who demand the acceptance of their barbaric way of life and its gradual predominance over the basic values of Europe."</i>
Migration / Refugees	Detention and mass deportation of refugees, dismantling the asylum process, militarized borders, a systemic collapse of humanitarian protections.	<i>"There is an ongoing war... Concentration camps filled with people of African origin have been created... massive extraditions of immigrants to their countries of origin."</i>  <i>"Whole islands being turned into spaces of administrative torture, and the sea turned into an aqueous cemetery, the theatre of an undeclared war... Closed detention centres are being constructed on hotspot islands and the mainland. The imposition of a new asylum law violates the very right to apply for asylum in Greece."</i>
Food / Agriculture	Major food system collapse resulting in widespread famine, agricultural breakdown, and starvation, especially driven by environmental or political instability.	<i>"If we do not change our behaviour in this respect, we will see harsher commodity shortages by 2040."</i>  <i>"...after a decade of contradictory policies, between denialist and warmongering governments that have totally exhausted the planet's natural resources in name of power and the right to well-being, and other pseudo-environmentalists who have almost caused the extinction of thousands of farm animal breeds and ancient crop varieties with intensive and aggressive agricultural practices, trying in vain to defeat world hunger..."</i>

Source: Own analysis

## 8. How can Europe overcome challenges of the future?

In the selection of 1239 stories (as mentioned in chapter 7), participants share the following ideas and suggestions for coping with future shocks and challenges, both at the EU level and at national/regional/local levels.

**Table 2.** Challenges and related strategies mentioned in the citizens' stories

Challenges	Suggested strategies to cope with the challenges
Security threats and defence vulnerabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creation of unified European armed forces</li> <li>• Investment in cyber defence capabilities and common cyber security standards</li> <li>• Development of European defence industry and technology</li> <li>• Joint military procurement and resource sharing</li> <li>• Enhanced border protection systems</li> <li>• Energy independence through diversification and renewable sources</li> <li>• Strategic autonomy in critical technologies and resources</li> <li>• New diplomatic frameworks with transformed Russia</li> </ul>
Democratic decline and institutional trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct election of EU leadership positions</li> <li>• Digital platforms for citizen participation in decision-making</li> <li>• Transparency requirements for all EU institutions</li> <li>• Stronger anti-corruption measures with real enforcement power</li> <li>• Local and regional decision-making powers enhancement</li> <li>• Simplified EU bureaucracy and clearer communication</li> <li>• Regular citizen referendums on major EU decisions</li> <li>• Majority-based decision-making instead of unanimity</li> </ul>
Migration and social cohesion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Common EU migration and asylum system</li> <li>• Skills-based immigration programs</li> <li>• Enhanced integration programs including language and cultural education</li> <li>• Support for local communities hosting migrants</li> <li>• Investment in countries of origin to address root causes</li> <li>• European-wide social housing programs</li> <li>• Cross-cultural exchange programs for youth</li> </ul>
Climate crisis and environmental degradation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Massive investment in renewable energy infrastructure</li> <li>• Green technology research and development</li> <li>• Circular economy implementation</li> <li>• Urban redesign for sustainability</li> <li>• Carbon pricing and environmental taxation</li> <li>• Reforestation and biodiversity protection programs</li> </ul>
Economic inequality and instability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• European minimum wage standards</li> <li>• Universal basic income pilots</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investment in education and job training</li> <li>• Support for regional development</li> <li>• Tax harmonization across EU</li> <li>• Housing affordability programs</li> <li>• Small business support systems</li> <li>• Flexible tax systems such as consumption-based models</li> </ul>
Technological disruption and digital divides	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Universal digital access programs</li> <li>• Digital skills training for all ages</li> <li>• AI ethics guidelines and regulation</li> <li>• Support for digital transformation of small businesses</li> <li>• Digital public services</li> <li>• Protection of privacy and personal data</li> <li>• Investment in digital infrastructure</li> <li>• Integration of AI while maintaining human control in education, work, and society</li> </ul>
Aging population and social welfare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pension system reform</li> <li>• Healthcare innovation and preventive care</li> <li>• Support for active aging</li> <li>• Intergenerational housing and care programs</li> <li>• Immigration policies linked to demographic needs</li> <li>• Family support policies</li> <li>• Flexible retirement options</li> </ul>
Global power shifts and strategic autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investment in strategic industries and technologies</li> <li>• Development of alternative financial systems</li> <li>• Enhanced diplomatic capabilities</li> <li>• Strategic resource stockpiles</li> <li>• International alliance building</li> <li>• Trade policy reform</li> <li>• Research and innovation leadership</li> </ul>
Healthcare system challenges and wellbeing disparities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revolutionary healthcare systems based on prevention and personalization</li> <li>• New approaches to wellbeing, including mental health investment and universal access to healthcare</li> </ul>
EU Institutional reform and democratic renewal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creation of new governance structures (e.g. EU federation with constitution, bicameral system)</li> <li>• Reinforced legitimacy through direct elections and representation</li> <li>• Accountability of political actors through enforceable oversight</li> </ul>
Geopolitical instability and shifting alliances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhanced European defence capabilities independent of NATO/US</li> <li>• New diplomatic frameworks with transformed Russia</li> </ul>
Automation, AI and future of work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integration of AI across society with human oversight</li> <li>• Adapting social and labour systems to post-automation economy</li> </ul>

Urban sustainability and ecological regeneration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustainable, smart cities with green corridors and self-driving vehicles</li> <li>• Local, renewable food and energy production systems</li> </ul>
Social cohesion and inclusive citizenship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expanded youth exchange, inclusion and volunteering programs</li> <li>• Universal access to opportunity via welfare, health and education</li> </ul>
Post-industrial economic transformation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creative, human-centred post-automation economy</li> <li>• Flexible, purpose-driven work models recognizing emotional intelligence</li> </ul>
Digital sovereignty and data governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital sovereignty through EU-hosted services under EU privacy law</li> </ul>

*Source: Own analysis*

Across diverse stories about Europe's future, citizens offer not just warnings, but concrete, hopeful strategies. Their visions go far beyond policy tweaks — they outline a Europe that is more **sovereign, democratic, inclusive, and prepared** for the challenges ahead.

Participants imagine a Union that takes strategic leadership in a shifting global landscape: building its own defence capabilities, mastering digital and energy sovereignty, and forging new diplomatic paths. Yet this outward strength is matched by an inward longing for **deep democratic renewal** — with calls for direct elections, citizen participation, and institutional transparency that reconnect Europe to its people.

The climate crisis is not seen in isolation, but as part of a broader transformation of how Europeans live, work, and care. Citizens envision sustainable cities, circular economies, and nature restoration — not as utopian dreams, but as necessary redesigns for survival and dignity.

In the face of automation and AI, participants are already imagining a **post-industrial, human-centred society** — where purpose, emotional wellbeing, and flexibility redefine the future of work. And underpinning it all is a clear belief: true resilience lies in **social cohesion, inclusion, and care**.

These citizen strategies reveal a striking readiness to reshape Europe from the ground up — not to return to the past, but to step boldly into a shared, just, and sovereign future.

## 9. The role and position of Europe in the world

Analysing the 340 stories that explicitly refer to Europe and EU institutions, the role and position of Europe as it is expressed in the stories can be summarised as follows:

### 9.1. Geopolitical Positioning

- Strategic autonomy
- Military self-reliance
- One diplomatic voice
- Global leadership
- Credible defence power



*"A democratic European Federation is in place [...] It is a global player capable to stand up for its values at home and abroad, promoting peaceful democratic integration in the world."*

*"The Europe of the future is the last stronghold of freedom [...] as the United States squandered this position with Trump's re-election and veered towards autocracy."*

*"By 2040, through decisive joint action by EU countries, Russia has lost [...] Ukraine has been admitted to the EU and NATO."*

*"Regarding the security and defence domain, achieving full strategic autonomy should be the future goal in a term of 20 years. [...] Strategic autonomy is intended to enhance the EU's capacity to act independently and following its interests and values, while strengthening its role as a global player."*

### 9.2. Economic Competition

- Digital economy leadership
- Innovation leadership
- Fair trade authority
- Economic sovereignty
- Industrial revival



*"The EU now has the largest economy in the world, having risen from its knees in the early 2020s."*

*"European companies, strengthened by EU policy, have grown and become market leaders in many sectors."*

*"Science would become the cornerstone of the EU budget [...] developing high-level technologies."*

*"Europe is on top of the world in terms of its industries, agriculture, food industry, car production, metal industry..."*

*"In 2040, the EU has set a new goal to expand its space exploration program and achieve a breakthrough in colonizing suitable but uninhabited planets..."*

*"In Europe, independence from foreign markets is increasing (production is returning to Europe from underdeveloped countries), internal consumption is increasing, similar to what is currently the case in the United States."*

### 9.3. Climate Leadership

- Green tech pioneer
- Environmental rule-setter
- Sustainability leader
- Climate diplomacy driver
- Zero-carbon transition champion



*"Cities are smart and interconnected, with intelligent infrastructure that guarantees energy efficiency and sustainable mobility."*

*"The European Green Deal will enable the EU to turn its economy into a greener one with very high value added."*

*"A European government with a stronger European Parliament will have a decisive say on the global climate governance and will push for more ambitious policies throughout the world. The possibility of imposing sanctions to countries which don't respect the principles of the climate governance."*

*"In this future, Europe leads the world in creating a circular economy. Cities are served by self-driving electric buses, hyperloop trains glide across borders, and shared e-bikes are the standard for last-mile mobility."*

*"We have completely left fossil fuels behind. Not only are solar and wind energy the norm, but energy storage technologies have made it possible to have a stable and sustainable network 24/7. Innovations such as nuclear fusion and advanced hydrogen energy provide the world with abundant, clean power."*

### 9.4. Technological Leadership

- Digital sovereignty
- Trusted AI leadership
- Innovation hub
- Tech standards setter
- Human-centred digitalisation



*"Technology and sustainability are at the heart of European society, with AI and robotics integrated into daily life while maintaining human values."*

*"Europe has strengthened its position in quantum computing and biotechnology. The European Union and China will be leaders in technological innovation."*

*"Digital transformation has revolutionized everyday life: quantum computers, artificial intelligence and smart cities shape people's lives."*

*"Europe had created a pan-continental network of smart cities. From Stockholm to Lisbon, every city had become an interconnected organism where transportation, energy, education, and healthcare were all managed by an intelligent grid. [...] Health care had become preventative – personalized medicine using AI would monitor everyone's health, making sure that no one ever fell through the cracks."*

## 9.5. Cultural Influence

- Democracy defender
- Education leader
- Cultural bridge-builder
- Soft power influencer
- Multilingual identity promoter

*"Europe has experienced a cultural renaissance characterised by the integration of diverse cultural influences. Artists and creative people from different backgrounds enrich the cultural landscape. [...] Society promotes dialogue between generations and respects the knowledge and experience of older people. Communities are shaped by a sense of connectedness between young and old."*



*"Cultural diversity remains a hallmark while a common European sense of identity grows [...] the EU promotes innovation and cultural exchange."*

*"My grandchildren played nearby with their pals from different corners of Europe, chatting effortlessly in multiple languages thanks to the continued EU Education Initiatives. Multilingual learning and cultural exchange projects have made European culture deeply accessible."*

*"Culture and education are the most powerful tools for social transformation. Education systems will respond to the cultural needs of an ever-changing society: globalised, pluralistic and technological. Culture has an intrinsic value as an expression of humanity, democracy and civic engagement that can be crucial in driving societal development. Culture and freedom of the arts contribute significantly to the vitality of a society and enable all segments of society to express their identities, fostering social cohesion and intercultural dialogue."*

## 10. Conclusions

The future stories analysed in this report reveal that people possess a rich, nuanced understanding of the continent's vulnerabilities and strengths. Citizens see resilience not merely as bouncing back or recovering from shocks, but also as opportunities to develop systemic capacity to adapt, regenerate and transform.

Across the chapters, a consistent message emerges: Europe must replace siloed crisis management with an integrated resilience agenda. Climate action, democratic renewal, security, digital sovereignty, social cohesion and economic wellbeing are deeply intertwined. Effective policy will require coordination inside EU institutions and co-creation with member states, regions and cities—aligning budgets, regulations and research around shared long-term objectives.

In summary, five guiding principles for the EU emerge from the analysis:

- **Strategic Autonomy with Open Cooperation** – Build the capacity to act independently in critical domains (defence, energy, digital infrastructure) while remaining an outward-looking champion of multilateralism.
- **Green Transformation as a Social Contract** – Make climate neutrality the engine of quality jobs, and fair taxation, while cutting pollution and ensuring no region or generation is left behind.
- **Human-Centred Tech Governance** – Lead on ethical AI, universal digital access and data rights, turning technology into a public good rather than a source of inequality.
- **Democracy that Delivers** – Deepen participation through digital deliberation, citizen assemblies and transparent decision-making; link EU legitimacy to tangible local benefits.
- **Culture of Care and Solidarity** – Embed wellbeing, mental health and intergenerational support into fiscal, health and education policies, recognising care as critical infrastructure.

The stories indicate that resilience cannot be an after-thought or a collection of isolated fixes. Europeans call for an integrated, forward-looking agenda that transforms vulnerabilities into opportunities and aligns day-to-day policies with a long-term vision of a secure, sustainable and democratic continent. The choices made today will determine whether the optimistic or pessimistic futures outlined by citizens become Europe's reality.

See you for the continuous construction of a positive European Union at:

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## References

<sup>1</sup> Futures4europe, '#OurFutures', Futures4europe website, accessed 30 June 2025, <https://www.futures4europe.eu/ourfutures>

<sup>2</sup> European Commission, *2025 Strategic Foresight Report*, COM (2025) 484, *forthcoming*

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