

Dear reader,

it is with great pleasure and gratitude that we welcome you to this first edition of the *Young Journal of European Affairs (YJEA)*. It has certainly been an extraordinary time for students all around the world and required immense efforts to uphold the spirit of higher education and academic curiosity while being left alone with one's thoughts, ideas and academic work most of the time. Research fundamentally relies on the exchange of ideas, experiences and points of view, all of which has barely been at our disposal as universities were among the first to close as the pandemic arose and have to a large extent still not opened up again. In light of these arguably challenging times, publishing the first edition of a student journal attests to many students' commitment to their discipline and is a confirmation of the very reason we decided to launch the *Young Journal of European Affairs* in 2020. It is not that students wouldn't have anything to contribute, it is the availability of options for them to share their insights with the world that is largely missing. As such, we are proud to be the ones to present these outstanding papers to you.

The topics addressed in this issue range from a European public sphere to European foreign policy, with a particular focus on issues concerning European foreign and security policy. You will come across pieces exploring the influence of intra-EU movement on the European identity, the composition and legitimisation of informal leadership groups as a way of circumventing deadlock on contentious issues in EU foreign policy, the effectiveness of the EU's instruments to promote democracy abroad as well as the extent to which the EU can be considered a normative foreign policy actor. While these topics certainly are of relevance for the study of the European Union in general, they are undoubtedly red-hot issues as the EU is in the pursuit of a coherent foreign policy purpose while keeping the Union from drifting apart amidst an era of crisis and rising Euro-scepticism.

Our journal would certainly cease to exist without the generous support of our academic advisors and contributors. We would like to convey special gratitude to Prof Dr Berthold Rittberger, who has advised us during the initial phase of the journal and continuously offered us support based on his expertise as Co-Editor in Chief of the *Journal of European Public Policy (JEPP)*. We equally want to

reiterate our deep appreciation for the assistance of Prof Dr Christoph Demmke, whose insights and suggestions on our peer-reviewing procedure shall be mentioned at this point. Furthermore, we very gratefully acknowledge the crucial role of our peer reviewers and their invaluable contribution to this first edition. As academics between the pre-doctoral level and leading professors in our fields of study, their pro bono work for the Young Journal of European Affairs is evidence of their commitment to the discipline and student research and is highly valued by our authors and us.

With the utmost gratitude, we thank the Geschwister-Scholl-Institute of Political Science at the University of Munich for their financial support ever since we launched the YJEA in 2020. We equally would like to emphasise our gratefulness to the Alumni club of the Heinrich-Böll-Foundation for their financial support of the first edition throughout 2021. It further remains to us to express our gratitude to the University Library at the University of Munich, in particular Volker Schallehn, Vanessa Gabriel and Caroline Ziegler, for providing and assisting us with this opportunity to publish the journal as an open-access outlet. Without their contribution, which they offered entirely free of charge, this presentation of the YJEA would not be possible.

In light of our closing remarks, we also want to direct our gratitude to all of our authors who entrusted us with their work and undertook impressive efforts throughout the reviewing and revision process to further enhance their contributions to the field of EU research. Our thanks also go to those whose work we couldn't publish this time but who certainly submitted relevant pieces of research. Last but not least, we especially want to thank our team, Benjamin Brown, Lara Dose, Alina Mehrens and Jakob Rindermann, for their relentless commitment and determination over the past year.

On behalf of the entire YJEA team and our authors, we hope you will enjoy this first edition of our journal and continue to follow our endeavours.

*Lara Breitmoser and Florian Lenner*

Co-Founders and Co-Editors in Chief