

KAS MAKER THON

Shape Our Europe!

Why Does Europe Need Good Ideas?

Europe's capacity to act is being put to the test by security risks, economic and technological competition, demographic ageing, and strains on democratic trust and social cohesion. "New ideas" are a practical requirement against such a backdrop. Democratic participation becomes a strategic advantage only when plurality is translated into workable solutions.

What is the KAS Makerthon?

The KAS Makerthon is an action-oriented ideation format. Teams whose members are intentionally diverse work intensely within a compact time frame (usually three days) on predefined societal or political challenges. The aim is not a comprehensive strategy, but original and implementable proposals that can be translated into political and societal practice.

What Makes the Concept Distinctive?

- Structured four-phase workflow (Analysis, Ideation, Execution, Pitch) from problem-framing to pitch-ready ideas.
- Deliberate heterogeneity to reduce path dependence and groupthink.
- Participation by design: methods such as the Idea Relay secure input from quieter participants prior to evaluation.
- Quality control: tools such as the COCD-Box test feasibility and originality; structured peer critique (e.g. Team Swap) consolidates proposals.
- Built for uptake: pitches are designed for real audiences and decision-makers, creating a credible pathway from ideas to agenda-setting.

Where is the Concept Used?

The concept was first implemented by scholarship holders in Cologne and has now become a regular feature in the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung scholarship programme (student-initiated seminars), with new cohorts adopting and continuing the format. Building on this core design, the KAS Makerthon Europe was introduced in 2023: it broadens participation beyond the scholarship community and links results to the State of Europe ("Europa-Rede") in Berlin as a highly visible forum for strategic reflection.

Which Ideas Were Developed During the 2025 KAS Makerthon Europe?

Numerous proposals were developed at the 2025 KAS Makerthon Europe. Four selected ideas were pitched live on stage at the State of Europe as the format's finalists: (1) a European security app ("ReadyEU") to strengthen crisis preparedness; (2) the Eurovision Start-up Contest, a pan-European entrepreneurship competition combining expert assessment with citizen micro-investment; (3) EU Gen Invest, an EU-backed start-in-life fund for every child to support education, housing, health, or entrepreneurship; and (4) the European Monument Challenge, inviting cities to jointly create monuments that combine a sense of local belonging with European values.

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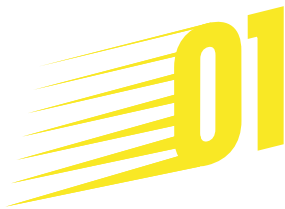
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01

**Introduction –
The Need
for New Ideas**

Felix Manuel Müller



"Europe is about ideas. It is about finding the political courage to turn those ideas into reality. That is the essence of Europe, that is what has driven us forward for the last decades, and that is the spirit we need to recapture now — that sense of hope and possibility. We need new ideas."

These were the striking words that opened European Parliament President Roberta Metsola's keynote address to the State of Europe in November 2023. The appeal resonates because it captures a fundamental truth: the European project has never thrived on inertia. Its legitimacy relies on the ability to craft innovative, convincing responses to new historical challenges.

For decades, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung has accompanied European integration processes through political dialogue, research and capacity building. Together with its partners, the foundation has been organising the State of Europe in Berlin since 2010. This annual event has grown into one of the leading public forums on European affairs in Germany. Its purpose is not to discuss day-to-day politics. Instead, it offers a stage where leading European actors reflect on the Union's condition and articulate longer-term horizons for its development – before an audience that includes political practitioners, civil society, academia, and the interested public. In doing so, the State of Europe provides a venue for strategic reflection and for articulating fresh ideas to meet the challenges ahead.

Democracies do not excel by reserving future-oriented thinking for political elites, but rather by unleashing their citizens' knowledge, creativity and experience. They transform diverse perspectives into shared progress, turning societal pluralism into a source of innovation. In times of accelerated change, participation is not only a democratic value, but a strategic resource; expanding the Union's capacity to innovate and deepening citizens' trust in democratic institutions. This participatory strength gives democracies a decisive edge over autocracies, which stifle involvement and thus squander their societies' potential for renewal.

At the same time, the European Way of Life is under pressure. The Union faces a multitude of external and internal challenges. A volatile geopolitical environment and heightened security risks coincide with economic headwinds, intensified technological competition, and demographic ageing, and this puts pressure on welfare states. In many member states, social cohesion is challenged by polarisation, eroding trust in institutions, and doubts about the capacity of democratic procedures to solve problems. Strategic reflections, such as those in the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung's "Shaping Europe" scenario study, underscore how closely these strands are interwoven and how strongly Europe's strategic room for manoeuvre in 2030 will depend on decisions taken in this decade. Against this backdrop, Metsola's call for "new ideas" is not rhetorical ornamentation. It is a practical requirement for sustaining Europe's capacity to act while remaining anchored in its values.

Participation, however, is not self-executing. Democratic systems require formats that translate plurality into productive problem-solving, and political parties play a central role in this transmission. They aggregate interests, structure debates and turn diffuse preferences into coherent programmes and decisions. At the same time, formats more tightly bound by time may complement this long-term work by creating focused spaces to think outside the box and to arrive at innovative ideas within a short period of time.

One format that has proven particularly useful for systematically developing such ideas is the KAS Makerthon. It is an action-oriented ideation format with a compact and clearly structured time frame that is designed to help diverse teams move from an initial shared understanding of a challenge to concrete, implementable approaches. Since 2023, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung has invited young talent from across Europe to take part in this process and to present the results of their work at the State of Europe. It creates a direct link between structured citizen-driven innovation and high-level political debate.

This publication builds on the conviction that Europe's need for new ideas also implies a need for effective tools to generate them. It pursues three aims. First, it introduces the KAS Makerthon concept, outlining its underlying rationale and core design features. Second, it traces the practical implementation of this concept in the context of the KAS Makerthon Europe 2025, showing how the process unfolds in practice, which adaptations were made on the ground, and what organisers and participants learnt along the way. Third, the publication presents the substantive outcomes of the 2025 Makerthon – ideas developed by young Europeans on key challenges ranging from security and competitiveness to demographic change and democratic cohesion – and thus demonstrates what the format can produce.

If Europe truly is "about ideas", then refining how we create them is a vital step towards shaping its future. The KAS Makerthon embodies years of iterative refinement – tested, tweaked and validated across contexts. It acts as a toolkit for parties, youth organisations, think tanks or civic groups to mobilise Europe's collective ingenuity. This publication is also intended to serve as inspiration and guidance for replication.



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**The KAS
Makerthon
Concept**

Felix Manuel Müller



The KAS Makerthon is an action-oriented ideation format that brings together diverse teams for intensive, time-bound collaboration on predefined societal or political challenges. Rather than drawing up comprehensive strategies, it aims to generate original and implementable solutions. Participants (*Makers*) are highly committed individuals from a variety of disciplines and with strong track records. Working in teams, they develop, test, and iteratively refine ideas that can be translated into concrete initiatives, projects, and policy-relevant proposals designed for real-world application and political uptake.

In contrast to established Hackathons, which typically focus on technical or digital prototyping, Makerthons focus on social, creative, and governance-oriented approaches. The format is still comparatively new and is not yet widely institutionalised. Accordingly, there is no standardised “Makerthon method”. Existing initiatives vary considerably in their design, such as the participation mode (in-person, digital, hybrid), temporal structure (compact block formats versus multi-session processes over several months), participant selection (curated cohorts versus open access), and the sequencing of process steps.

The author of this contribution developed the concept presented here and a group of Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung scholarship holders implemented it in Cologne in May 2022 for the first time. It was subsequently refined based on practical experience. The initial aim was to better leverage the think-tank potential of a diverse, high-performing scholarship community for the foundation's work. Following positive feedback and tangible outputs, the KAS Makerthon has become a regular feature in the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Scholarship Programme's seminar portfolio. Since then, at least one Makerthon per year has been designed, organised and executed by the scholarship holders themselves within the framework of student-initiated seminars. Importantly, after the original initiators completed their funding period, new cohorts adopted and continued the format; indicating robustness and the value participants attribute to it. Methodologically, the format is structured around one overarching challenge and typically four sub-challenges, each addressed by a team of some six to eight participants and resulting in a total group size of approximately 24 to 30 people.

Building on this core design, the KAS Makerthon Europe was introduced in 2023 as a specialised variant that deliberately broadens the participant base beyond the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung's scholarship holders. It brings together young talent from outside the scholarship community, including participants from across Europe and international contexts, which enriches the process with additional professional, institutional, and cultural perspectives. While the underlying methodology remains unchanged, the results are presented in the high-profile setting of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung's State of Europe event in Berlin. This, in turn, ensures direct access to political decision-makers and a broader European audience.

The KAS Makerthon Concept

01 Analysis
Phase
Discover It!

02 Ideation
Phase
Ideate It!

03 Execution
Phase
Make It!

04 Pitch
Phase
Share It!

Figure 1: The four phases of the KAS Makerthon.

The KAS Makerthon Process

The KAS Makerthon process provides a time-bound framework that structures the work of the *Makers* from initial problem-framing to the presentation of solutions. The format is conducted as an in-person event and usually takes place over a focused three-day block, enabling intensive collaboration, sustained momentum, and iterative refinement of ideas. Its four-phase workflow is summarised in Figure 1. The subsequent sections specify each phase in detail.

From an operational standpoint, the KAS Makerthon benefits from a room layout that reflects its alternation between plenary inputs and parallel teamwork. Ideally, one larger plenary room is available for the *Coach Briefing*, *Pitch Coaching*, and the *Internal Heats* (for details, see the subsequent sections), complemented by three additional breakout rooms that can be assigned as dedicated team workspaces (with the plenary room doubling as a fourth team room during parallel work). Since the process relies on visual clustering, posting, and structured peer feedback, each workspace should be equipped with pin-boards or whiteboards and a basic facilitation kit (flip-chart paper, markers, sticky notes, tape, and coloured voting dots), to enable rapid synthesis and consistent documentation.

The organisers select the *Makers* in advance and assign them to deliberately heterogeneous teams. In doing so, care is taken to combine subject-matter experts with participants from outside the respective field in each group. This team design is intended to foster unconventional, out-of-the-box thinking and to avoid path-dependent, discipline-bound solution patterns and groupthink. From the outset, the overarching challenge and sub-challenges are introduced and contextualised, supported by expert input to establish a shared understanding of the issues at stake. The core of the process lies in team-based work on the sub-challenges: four parallel groups of *Makers* develop, test, and refine solution approaches within the overarching thematic frame. The process culminates in structured pitches, in which *Team Anchors* present their groups' proposals to an external audience and political decision-makers.

Warm Up – The Analysis Phase

The Analysis Phase prepares *Makers* both substantively and socially for the KAS Makerthon's intensive work. It aims to create a shared understanding of the overarching challenge and sub-challenges, while also building sufficient trust within the group for open, creative, and at times controversial discussion. The phase begins ahead of the on-site meeting and continues through the first plenary activities on site.

In a first step, participants receive access to preparatory material ahead of the Makerthon. This material typically combines more demanding resources (such as scientific articles, policy papers or analytical reports) with low-threshold formats (such as podcasts, explanatory videos or short briefings). Self-study is voluntary and self-directed. Participants are invited, but not obliged, to engage with the material, and are explicitly encouraged to draw on their own prior knowledge, experience, and sources. This approach lowers entry barriers, accommodates different learning styles, and time constraints. Moreover, it avoids the impression that there is a single knowledge base from which all solutions must be derived.

In order for the Makerthon to succeed, it may be beneficial for participants not to be embedded in tightly knit pre-existing group structures and not to have strong prior social ties that shape interactions in advance. Fresh constellations encourage participants to meet one another with an open mind and to engage with arguments rather than established roles or alliances. That is why a *Makers Huddle* takes place upon arrival, allowing participants to introduce themselves, and get to know each other. This sequence of short interaction exercises is important for fostering a constructive atmosphere, so that participants feel at ease contributing their ideas, raising concerns, and bringing forward preliminary thoughts during the subsequent phases.

The KAS Makerthon Concept

Once the initial social groundwork has been laid, a substantive orientation through a *Coach Briefing* in plenary takes place. Invited experts give concise presentations that cover the overarching challenge as well as all sub-challenges, outlining key trends, dilemmas, and points of contention. In previous Makerthons, distinguished scholars have contributed to this input – for example, Prof Dr Cornelia Woll and Prof Dr Karl-Rudolf Korte – as well as topic-specific practitioners. The role of the experts is not to prescribe solutions or to champion specific positions. Rather, their task is to raise participants' awareness about key issues, highlight relevant constraints and blind spots, and offer fundamental insights that may inform, but do not predetermine, the ideation process. Only a limited number of clarifying questions can be addressed in the plenary due to time constraints. Ideally, expert support remains available throughout the KAS Makerthon. However, in the context of initiative seminars, ongoing attendance is often unrealistic. It therefore suffices if experts attend the *Coach Briefing* and are available again for the *Internal Heats* (for details, see the subsequent sections). This support can be organised flexibly. Since the same experts do not need to cover both elements, the *Internal Heats* can draw on additional or different coaches as needed.

Taken together, these elements of the Analysis Phase – optional preparatory material, deliberate team composition, an interactive *Makers Huddle*, and a non-prescriptive *Coach Briefing* – guarantee that participants enter the subsequent ideation work with both a minimum common knowledge base and a supportive group climate. This combination is a key strength of the KAS Makerthon format. It levels the playing field without enforcing uniformity by creating conditions in which diverse perspectives can be productively brought to bear on complex societal and political challenges.

Build the Momentum – The Ideation Phase

The Ideation Phase marks the transition from shared problem understanding to the deliberate generation of a multitude of potential approaches to the defined challenges. After the plenary introduction, the pre-assigned teams (typically four groups, Teams I–IV) convene in their respective rooms to strengthen their specific viewpoint within the given sub-challenge. Divergent thinking is explicitly prioritised at this stage. No proposal is ruled out in advance and criticism or evaluation is deliberately omitted. The emphasis lies on creative vision, openness and curiosity. The objective is to produce as many different approaches to addressing the problem as possible. To channel this creativity in a way that is both participation-oriented and efficient, the KAS Makerthon uses two complementary methods: the *Idea Relay* and the *Idea Circuit*.

Idea Relay (in-team): in a first step, participants work in silence and independently reflect on the sub-challenge. Each *Maker* writes down approaches or idea elements on a sheet of paper in short, self-contained entries. When someone feels like they have nothing further to contribute at that time, they signal this by turning the sheet around. The sheets are then passed to the next participant, who reads what has already been written and adds further approaches or variations – without criticising, filtering or ranking previous entries. This relay continues until all sheets have circulated through the team and are finally placed in the centre of the table.

Once the silent phase is over, the team briefly organises the collected material. The entries are read out, grouped, summarised, and consolidated. Overlaps are merged, related ideas are clustered, and initial thematic strands begin to emerge. Crucially, this step is not subject to evaluation. Its sole purpose is to structure and preserve the increasing number of raw approach ideas, ensuring that all voices are captured – including those of more reserved participants – and that these initial potential ways forward remain as broad as possible prior to any form of assessment. As a final step within the *Idea Relay*, the resulting clusters are transferred onto pinboards or whiteboards in each team's room in a clear and legible form. The purpose is documentation, not completion. Board entries may still be incomplete and loosely structured.

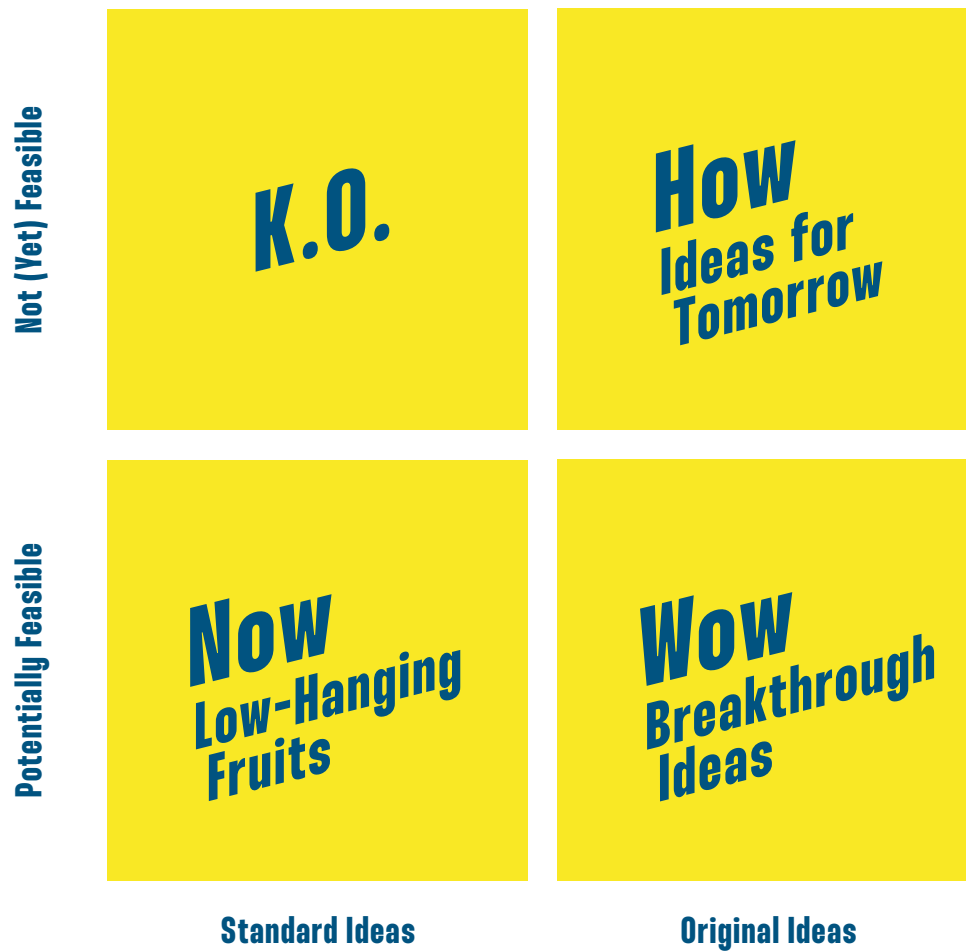


Figure 2: The COCD-Box.

Idea Circuit (cross-team): in a second step, the teams broaden their set of approaches by deliberately introducing external perspectives. All *Makers* visit the other teams' rooms, review the displayed material, engage in short discussions, and add new prompts, extensions, and alternative approach ideas directly on moderation cards or sticky notes.

This *Idea Circuit* deliberately involves people who are not working in depth on the respective sub-challenge. Their external view often give rise to assumptions that insiders take for granted, highlights parallels between different sub-challenges and triggers fresh combinations of partial approaches. At this point, the goal remains to foster expansion, not to pass judgement. Comments and additions are treated as further approach options and building blocks, not as an evaluative filter. Following the *Idea Circuit*, each team reconvenes in its own room, reviews the input, and integrates it into its clusters as additional idea material.

This way, the Ideation Phase combines focused teamwork with structured cross-team stimulation. The result is a rich, well-documented pool of preliminary approaches to the challenges – individual ideas, combinations, and possible response options – that is intentionally unfiltered and diverse. This pool provides the raw material on which the subsequent phase of consolidation and feasibility assessment can be built.

Makers' High – The Execution Phase

Up to this point, the KAS Makerthon has focused on generating as many approaches as possible. The Execution Phase shifts the emphasis from breadth to practicality and originality. Its core task is to identify those ideas that are both promising and can be realistically implemented. Ideas that are clearly unfeasible will not be taken seriously by stakeholders. For this reason, the collated approaches are now assessed and prioritised with a view to real-world application.

The KAS Makerthon uses the COCD-Box² as a simple but effective tool for this assessment. Approaches are categorised along two dimensions: ease of implementation (feasible vs. unfeasible) and originality (standard vs. original). This creates four fields in the matrix (see Figure 2). Each team at first discusses the approaches to clarify assumptions, constraints, and intended effects. Based on this shared discussion, each *Maker* then independently assigns every proposal to a COCD-field by placing a coloured sticker. The resulting sticker distribution illustrates which categorisation commands majority support and where assessments diverge.

Blue can be used for standard or non-innovative ideas. Practical experience shows that some types of proposals tend to fall into this category. A frequent pattern is generic exchange formats (“bringing people together”) or broad information campaigns. These ideas are not dismissed, but are treated as baseline options. The focus of the discussion then shifts to how teams can move beyond such standard approaches towards more distinctive, targeted, and innovative proposals.

The most relevant ideas are those that receive the highest number of red and yellow stickers. Red ideas are especially valuable, as they promise a high impact with a realistic chance of implementation. Yellow ideas are also discussed further, with the explicit aim of identifying how their feasibility could be improved.

Once the teams have identified their most promising approaches, they prepare a *Fronrunner Showcase* in their breakout room. Each *Fronrunner Showcase* features only a small, curated set of top proposals – usually three. These are presented in a clearly structured and visually accessible format – for example through concise headings, diagrams, drawings, models, or bullet points displayed on pinboards or whiteboards. The purpose of the *Fronrunner Showcase* is to make the proposals easy to understand at a glance and to establish a shared reference point for structured discussion and feedback with other participants.

The *Fronrunner Showcase* is followed by the *Team Swap* in order to introduce these curated proposals to an external perspective. In this phase, the original teams are temporarily dissolved and reorganised into mixed review groups. The organisers assemble the groups so that each includes members from different original teams, while making sure that no one evaluates the *Fronrunner Showcase* they helped to create. Each review group – named Team Cologne, Team Cadenabbia, Team Bonn, and Team Rhöndorf – is assigned to one unfamiliar *Fronrunner Showcase* and visits it with a “fresh pair of legs”. The group jointly interprets the displayed proposals. It clarifies which problem is being addressed, identifies the approaches, and assesses what appears particularly strong, unclear, or challenging. Suggestions for improvement are recorded on moderation cards and left in the breakout room. This way, the ideas are subject to constructive scrutiny by participants who have worked on different sub-challenges and can therefore credibly contribute new perspectives.

Finally, the original teams reconvene in their own rooms. They read through the feedback, discuss it, and decide which suggestions they want to adopt. They then refine their approaches, clarify open questions, and, where necessary, adjust their proposals on the basis of this. At the end of the Execution Phase, each team has a small set of refined, practice-oriented solution approaches that are ready to be prepared for presentation in the subsequent Pitch Phase.

Photo Finish – The Pitch Phase

The Pitch Phase turns the refined solution approaches into concise presentations that are suitable for an audience and can be communicated beyond the Makerthon, especially to external stakeholders and political decision-makers. The KAS Makerthon is not designed to produce results “for the drawer”. Its ambition is to promote political and societal debate by articulating concrete and actionable proposals. The Pitch Phase therefore focuses on channelling complex ideas into clear messages, testing their plausibility under external scrutiny and framing them in a way that enables uptake by relevant actors.

On the final day, each team first identifies its most promising idea. The *Makers* jointly review their portfolio of approaches, discuss strengths and weaknesses, and select the option that best combines originality, feasibility and expected impact. Following this internal selection, all *Makers* receive a *Pitch Coaching* session in the plenary to equip them with practical tools and advice. Subsequently, each team appoints one *Team Anchor* who will present its idea. Ideally, this person is chosen by consensus to ensure broad ownership of the decision. If no consensus can be reached, the *Team Anchor* is selected by secret ballot. The group then supports its *Team Anchor* in preparing the pitch.

The plenary then assembles for the *Internal Heats*. Each *Team Anchor* presents the team’s approach within a clearly defined time frame, followed by a short round of questions and comments. Invited experts provide feedback on clarity, coherence, and feasibility. As “critical friends” rather than judges, their role is to test assumptions, point out blind spots and, where possible, suggest concrete ways to strengthen the proposal. Teams can use this feedback to further refine their solution approaches after the on-site Makerthon.

A constitutive feature of the KAS Makerthon format is an external pitch round in front of political decision-makers – the *KAS Makerthon Finals*. As part of Makerthons organised within the scholarship programme’s student-initiated seminars, selected teams have presented their approaches to, among others, Philipp Amthor and Petra Köpping. These encounters show that political actors are willing to engage with the results, provide substantive feedback, and, in the best case, take up ideas for their own work.

The *KAS Makerthon Finals* underlines the practical orientation of the KAS Makerthon and build a strong bridge between creative problem-solving and political practice. It signals to the *Makers* that their work is taken seriously beyond the workshop setting and that there is a realistic pathway from idea generation to political agenda-setting or implementation. At the same time, it affords decision-makers a compact and well-prepared glimpse into innovative solutions developed by engaged young talent. This way, the Pitch Phase becomes more than a presentation exercise. It is the pivotal interface connecting the experimental space of the Makerthon with the realities of political decision-making.



03

**Putting the
Concept
into Practice**

Tim Peter

The KAS Makerthon Europe 2025 afforded a valuable opportunity to demonstrate the practical application of the concept. It took place at Konrad Adenauer's former summer residence, Villa La Collina, on Lake Como from the 3rd to the 5th of October 2025. Alongside the historically inspiring location, the KAS Makerthon Europe also benefited from a team of expert coaches from different European think tanks and institutes. Moreover, attendees were selected from a pool of politically interested young talents from the foundation's and partners' networks. The State of Europe offered an extraordinary pitch venue that fuelled ambition and engagement. These excellent conditions cannot be replicated by student-organised seminars – and that does not have to be the case. The concept offers sufficient flexibility to be implemented in various settings.

The following description and analysis thus serve as an example of the concept's implementation under ideal conditions. Nevertheless, it will also become clear that coaches and teams can make minor adjustments to the concept at their discretion, sometimes integrating additional tools in certain situations, for example when discussions come to a deadlock. This methodological adjustability is crucial for reacting to group dynamics in an ambitious process of idea generation under time pressure.

The main challenge of the KAS Makerthon Europe 2025 was "How can we shape an action-oriented Europe that succeeds in the world of tomorrow?" The sub-challenges for the groups in each case were:

1. "How can Europe build sustainable security capabilities?"
2. "How can Europe generate new momentum for growth, innovation, and competitiveness?"
3. "How can Europe create future prospects for young people to counter emigration and demographic ageing?"
4. "How can Europe strengthen its democracy and social cohesion?"

The presentation proceeds in the chronological order of the Makerthon stages.³

Analysis Phase – "Discover It!"

Before the Makerthon contest began, the groups familiarised themselves with the subject-specific literature provided by the Makerthon organisers and coaches. This offered an opportunity to become acquainted with the subject and reflect on topics and policy proposals under discussion in the political and academic debates. However, this first step also gave the impression of an overwhelming body of literature, which is also rather theoretical and makes it difficult to derive concrete, workable approaches to the respective sub-challenge.

Putting the Concept into Practice

At the beginning of the on-site Makerthon, the *Coach Briefings* helped the teams organise the broad body of literature and frame the issue. Rather than presenting ready-made solutions to the challenges, the coaches directed their attention to contentious issues and trade-offs between policy objectives and underlying causes. For instance, the coach on democracy and social cohesion introduced the concept of “Heimat” or belonging, offering a fresh perspective that the group had not yet associated the topic with. Later in the process, the group considered it to be a useful concept for anchoring several ideas aimed at fostering a sense of belonging.

During the first team session, the group exchanged views and impressions on the respective topics and defined areas that they wanted to focus on. Seeing as the sub-challenges were intentionally defined in broad terms, marking out the field was essential for the following phases. For instance, one group used a series of basic questions to translate the literature and the expert briefing into practical statements (“Who needs what?”; “When is it needed?”; “Why is it difficult to provide?”). They then wrote down their assumptions, tested them with quick research, and discarded the ones that did not hold up. The group therefore developed a shared understanding of the problem and narrowed down the topic. For example, the group on democracy and social cohesion promptly geared their discussion towards common symbols, such as monuments, flags, anthems, shared traditions, and national holidays.

Ideation Phase – “Ideate It!”

During the *Idea Relay*, groups silently generated ideas by writing them on notes and circulating them for additional comments and related ideas from group members. The groups reported that this method helped everyone contribute, including the quieter participants. The combination of the *Idea Relay* and the diversity of the groups, which included people of different nationalities and academic backgrounds, produced a plethora of ideas. However, this process was also described as “somewhat chaotic due to the sheer number of sheets”. Group members provided feedback at an early stage in order to refine the ideas. This process of structured creativity generated a large pool of ideas that would be tested, revised, merged, or discarded in subsequent stages.

With the *Idea Circuit*, feedback from the other teams’ participants was incorporated into the idea generation process. At this stage, first thoughts on the feasibility of the ideas were also exchanged. During the ideation phase, some groups already applied selection mechanisms to narrow down their myriad of ideas. For example, one group kept only those ideas from the *Idea Relay* that fulfilled three criteria: (1) easy to explain to non-experts, (2) feasible to pilot, and (3) useful across member states.

This approach resulted in a small, coherent portfolio rather than a single pet project. Another group incorporated an initial idea about youth financial literacy programmes into the broader concept of the Eurovision Start-up Contest, which was later voted the winner of the Makerthon at the State of Europe. The groups also reported benefiting from informal exchanges prior to or after sessions. For instance, they screened and discussed the other teams’ comments from the *Idea Circuit* during the lunch break. The ideal conditions at Villa La Collina, which had much space for exchange and discussion, facilitated this informal, continuous dialogue.



Execution Phase – “Make It!”

The groups used the COCD-Box to categorise their ideas according to their level of originality and feasibility. To enable equal participation, the voting process consisted of posting colour-coded stickers on cardboard signs of the ideas. The groups then discussed which ideas to categorise as “WOW – Breakthrough Ideas” with a high level of originality and feasibility, and “HOW – Ideas for Tomorrow” with a high degree of originality and limited feasibility. Following an intense discussion, there were one or two ideas that stood out in most teams. These ideas were further refined and embedded in the overarching goals of the sub-challenges. The teams subsequently designed their *Frontrunner Showcase* in their breakout rooms so as to present their ideas. While most teams decorated their whiteboards, one team even rearranged the furniture in their room to illustrate their ideas.

In this session, the guidance and expertise of the coaches were particularly important. For example, one coach suggested that his group apply a simple causal theory approach to structure their ideas: (1) define the desired outcome, (2) identify the factors that drive or block it, and (3) link the idea to those factors and select leading indicators. Applying a standardised framework helped evaluate the group members’ technical reservations and the coach’s expert assessment, and allowed the group to quickly agree on a few favourite ideas.

The *Team Swap* was a baptism of fire when it came to showcasing ideas. Ideas were tested rigorously because teams were put together in a way that no member of the presenting group was present during feedback. What is more, the *Frontrunner Showcase* had to be self-explanatory given that no group member was permitted to stay behind to explain the arrangement – or soften the critique. Feedback was written on cards and pinned next to the respective ideas. The groups reported that the *Team Swap* afforded fresh perspectives and constructively highlighted areas that needed more clarity and justification. However, they sometimes perceived the critique to be harsh, as all ideas were thoroughly criticised – sometimes due to a lack of time to provide more information about the concept when the idea rooms were designed. Ultimately, this process led to further refinement of the ideas and provided guidance to groups that had not yet selected a favourite idea. This laid the groundwork for the following Pitch Phase.

Pitch Phase – “Share It!”

In the first stage of the Pitch Phase, teams had to select a speaker to present their idea, the *Team Anchor*. For most groups, this was an easy decision because they gave preference to the person who had originally drafted the idea. Pitch coaching helped the speakers prepare for their first pitch in front of all participants and staff members. However, the preparation time was short, and perfection was not expected. Some teams collaboratively developed the pitch text, while others gave their speaker the opportunity to do a few dry runs and receive peer feedback after individual preparation.



Picture 1: The groups categorise their ideas according to the COCD-Box.

Picture 2: The groups prepare their Frontrunner Showcase.



03

For the *Internal Heats*, a jury board was arranged with the Makerthon's organisers and coaches. The jury provided feedback on both style and content. In addition to the jury, the participants shared their impressions and advice. The *Team Anchors* found the feedback to be constructive and helpful for refining their pitches in a safe environment. Before the final pitch at the State of Europe, the *Team Anchors* had several weeks to do further research, consult with their groups, and practise their presentation style. Some groups also held digital follow-up meetings to further elaborate their ideas and ideally prepare their *Team Anchors* for the *KAS Makerthon Finals*.

At the State of Europe address on the 10th of November 2025, the *Team Anchors* pitched the ideas consecutively, much like at a start-up donor conference.⁴ With its thematic fit, the idea of a Eurovision Start-up Contest won with 39 percent of the vote. The winner joined the main panel with the 2025 State of Europe speaker Manfred Weber, President of the European People's Party (EPP) and chairman of its group in the European Parliament. Extensive media coverage and the presence of political and business decision-makers ensured that the ideas and initiatives continued to be discussed long after the State of Europe, with a view to exploring opportunities to implement the proposals, either in full or in part.

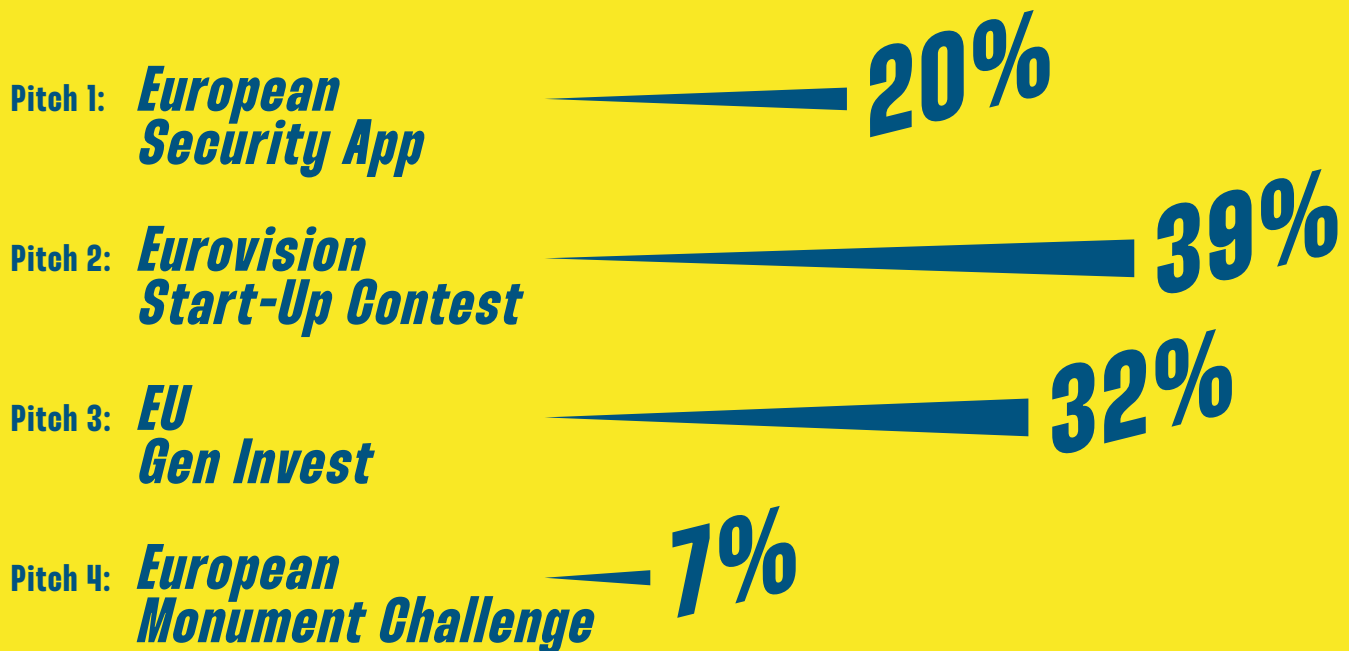


Figure 3: The official poll results of the State of Europe 2025; question: "Which pitch has convinced you the most?" (372 responses submitted). Deviations from 100 percent are due to rounding.



Picture 3: Chelsea Nshuti pitches the idea of EU Gen Invest at the State of Europe 2025.

Picture 4: Mathis Sieglerschmidt, Team Anchor of the winning idea of the 2025 KAS Makerthon Europe, joins the panel discussion with Manfred Weber.



04

Europe
of Ideas

This chapter presents the main ideas of the four groups. The groups focused on the following fields: (1) security and defence, (2) innovation and competitiveness, (3) future prospects and demographic ageing, and (4) democracy and social cohesion. Rather than developing holistic solutions to pressing challenges, the goal was to generate concrete, actionable ideas that improve the status quo. These ideas cannot solve the challenges, but they can contribute towards doing so. In each of the following sections, two group members present the ideas on behalf of their team.

Ready When It Matters Most: Crisis Preparedness in Times of Upheaval

Marco la Rocca, Lena Strauß

Addressing the sub-challenge “How can Europe build sustainable security capabilities?”, our group developed three ideas: (1) a Uniform Day, (2) an Anti-Disinformation and Media Literacy Training Programme, and (3) the ReadyEU Crisis Portal. These proposals offer feasible and scalable approaches to address the issue of European security, with concrete actions that impact citizens, governments, EU bodies, and institutions.

Uniform Day

A Uniform Day could be established throughout the EU. It would entail reservists and active military personnel wearing uniforms at work or in daily life and participating in community events, such as school Q&As and workplace briefings. This visibility normalises the sight of citizens in uniform, builds trust, and sparks conversations about crisis preparedness. Such an approach also supports recruitment and retention efforts and bridges the civil-military gap. The programme could be based on voluntary participation with clear legal and safety guidelines; employers and partners could provide internal informational sessions; and municipalities could host open-house activities with civil protection and first responders. A pilot programme can be organised with a minimum of one and a maximum of three cities per member state, which present themselves as the main event sites.

Anti-Disinformation & Media Literacy Training Programme

A standardised, modular curriculum on disinformation, verification, and crisis communication can be developed. Designed as a train-the-trainer programme, it allows certified graduates to run local workshops in schools, workplaces, and municipalities. In the first hour of a crisis, rumours spread faster than facts. Media literacy and basic open-source intelligence and verification skills help communities to act on trusted guidance. The EU could publish a standardised syllabus, set up a simple credentialing system, and provide open-access material. Universities, public broadcasters, fact-checkers, and civil society can deliver the training using this standardised method. The programme would be easy to pilot by starting with bottom-up sessions at schools or workplaces as part of general crisis preparedness training.

ReadyEU Crisis Portal

ReadyEU is a crisis portal with a companion app that provides immediate, localised, and authoritative instructions in your own language throughout the entire EU. When someone opens the app during a wildfire, flood, prolonged power outage, chemical incident, or cyber-induced blackout, it automatically analyses their location and presents a clear event card with three to five tailored actions. These instructions are paired with tap-to-navigate routes to the nearest shelters, first-aid stations, and water or food distribution hubs. Each location is shown with its name, address, distance, status, and last update. The guidance and maps are cached for offline use, so they work even when networks are congested. An SMS fallback provides essential steps and coordinates where data coverage fails.

While member states are already developing their own platforms, this platform can provide guidance and promote preparedness everywhere and for everyone; including tourists, commuters, and those who do not have the respective national app installed. The EU establishes a common data model, cybersecurity and accessibility baseline, and multilingual templates. Member states host national nodes and integrate their existing alert systems. Municipalities author and approve local standard operating procedures and location data to ensure accurate and reliable information for the last mile. We can already implement this by reusing battle-tested patterns from Ukraine's crisis technologies, such as offline maps, shelter directories, and rapid content operations, and by integrating as opposed to replacing national channels.

Twelve Points for Europe: Enabling Europe's Start-Up Future

Ninni Norra, Mathis Sieglerschmidt

Our team's most promising proposal was the Eurovision Start-Up Contest. It was inspired by the spirit and success of the well-known Eurovision Song Contest, which unites millions of Europeans year after year in a celebration of creativity, talent, and cultural exchange. Drawing on this familiar and engaging model, we envisioned a pan-European competition for entrepreneurs and innovators to promote inspiration, visibility, and participation in Europe's start-up ecosystem.

This is particularly important for younger generations who have faced economic uncertainty and geopolitical challenges in recent years. In response to our group's sub-challenge "How can Europe generate new momentum for growth, innovation, and competitiveness?", this project could address the double challenge of economic stagnation and youth disillusionment by offering a platform that transforms start-up entrepreneurship into a shared European story.

Much like the original Eurovision, the contest would take place in two main stages:

1. National Selections – Each member state would host its own selection round in a format of its own choosing to identify promising start-ups and young entrepreneurs. Public visibility and citizen engagement would be encouraged to facilitate national conversations about innovation and economic renewal.
2. European Competition – The selected national winners would then compete at the European level in a dynamic, "Shark Tank"-style live event. Contestants would pitch their ideas in front of a jury of institutional investors and business leaders, as well as a live and remote Europe-wide audience.

In the spirit of engagement, the Eurovision Start-Up Contest would introduce a public "investment" system based on the Eurovision voting mechanism. Citizens across Europe could allocate points to their favourite ideas as micro-investments, effectively becoming small-scale supporters of start-up innovation. This would improve access to start-up funding, introduce young Europeans to the principles of investment in an engaging way, and strengthen the sense of shared ownership in Europe's economic future. The overall winner would receive seed funding coordinated by the European Investment Bank, ensuring real-world impact with professional involvement.

In addition to competition, the broader goal of the project is both cultural and motivational: to celebrate Europe's entrepreneurial spirit and provide positive role models for the next generation. By making founders and innovators from all corners of the continent more visible, the contest would showcase Europe's creativity, diversity, and drive for renewal.

From Demographic Challenge to Shared Opportunity: Reimagining Europe's Intergenerational Contract

Sofia Nolte, Chelsea Nshuti

Our group worked on the sub-challenge “How can Europe create future prospects for young people to counter emigration and demographic ageing?” Traditional policy responses primarily focus on supporting older generations through pension reform, long-term care, and active ageing programmes. However, younger Europeans, who bear much of the socioeconomic and financial burden of these trends, are rarely at the centre of the debate. Two key ideas emerged from the discussion: (1) GenC Housing and (2) EU Gen Invest. Both are designed to strengthen intergenerational connections and make sure that Europe's demographic transition becomes a shared opportunity rather than a growing divide.

GenC Housing

GenC Housing addresses two of Europe's most pressing issues: an ageing population and a shortage of affordable housing. The concept entails creating multi-generational residential buildings in cities and towns with each floor being home to a different age group. At the same time, residents share spaces and responsibilities:

1. The ground floor would host a childcare facility, providing close, reliable care for working parents.
2. Above that, serviced apartments would accommodate older residents who live independently but could benefit from daily support.
3. A communal floor in the middle would be open to all residents for meals, activities, and social events, encouraging intergenerational connections.
4. The upper floors would provide student accommodation, offering affordable housing and a vital sense of community for young people who are just starting out.

Smaller and shared housing models will become increasingly necessary as the European population ages and urban space becomes more limited. However, this model offers more than just a shared roof; it promotes the sharing of care, time, and experience. Younger residents can help older ones with digital tasks or errands, while older neighbours can support families or students by providing advice, childcare, or companionship. By pooling these informal networks, the model reduces the burden on public services while fostering solidarity, social capital and well-being.

EU Gen Invest

Our second idea, EU Gen Invest, aims to financially prepare young Europeans for the future. The concept is straightforward: each child born in the EU would receive a personal investment fund financed by contributions from national governments and the EU and managed by the European Investment Bank. Over time, the fund would grow through safe investments and become accessible when the individual reached 18 years of age.

The fund could be used for the following four essential areas: (1) Housing – to assist with a deposit or the initial rent; (2) Education – to support university studies, training, or mobility; (3) Health – to cover preventative or (mental) health expenses; and (4) Entrepreneurship – to start a small business or social project. By focusing on these strategic priorities, EU Gen Invest would empower young people to build secure and independent lives. The fund promotes equal opportunities across member states and ensures that future generations are better equipped to face demographic and economic challenges.

Both ideas share the same ambition, namely to transform Europe's demographic transition into something to prepare for together, rather than something to fear. GenC Housing builds bridges between generations with regard to how we live, and EU Gen Invest builds them in light of how we plan our futures. Together, they remind us that Europe's greatest resource is its capacity to renew itself through connection and care.

United in Diversity: Strengthening Europe's Sense of Belonging

Johanna Knauer, Elise Priester

For the sub-challenge “How can Europe strengthen its democracy and social cohesion?”, our group explored approaches to identity formation, fostering dialogue, and creating European symbols. Since the proposals were intended to be thought-provoking and creative, we developed ideas that approached democracy and social cohesion in new and engaging ways. Our main ideas are: (1) the European Pantheon, (2) the European Food Day, and (3) the European Monument Challenge.

European Pantheon

The European Pantheon would be a central physical site dedicated to historical and contemporary European thinkers, artists, political leaders, scientists, and civil society actors who have shaped Europe's intellectual and moral landscape. The Pantheon would serve as a place of remembrance and gathering – a place where citizens could come together to reflect, engage in debate, and experience Europe as a shared cultural and civic space. The European Commission would grant admission based on transparent criteria that ensure geographical and disciplinary diversity. Unlike existing cultural centres, the Pantheon would be designed as a symbolic monument and architectural embodiment of Europe's shared heritage and pluralism.

European Food Day

The European Food Day would take place once a year in all member states. Local markets would host European-themed food festivals, enabling citizens to taste dishes from across the Union. A “European Dish of the Year” would be selected, ideally with multiple regional variations, such as filled pasta (e.g. pierogi, tortellini, and ravioli). Schools could organise themed school lunch days, and supermarkets could participate by offering themed product promotions. The goal would be to celebrate and raise awareness of how European cultures differ in expression, yet often share common culinary roots. This would make interconnectedness tangible in everyday life.

European Monument Challenge

The European Monument Challenge addresses a key question that has emerged from our discussions: how can we make European identity tangible for citizens of different EU member states? This proposal stems from the critical observation that many monuments across Europe originate from historical periods when public resources were primarily invested in commemorating wars, military victories, and monarchic power. While these monuments call for the remembrance of significant chapters in history, they do not represent contemporary Europe's defining achievements: peaceful cooperation, democratic governance, and cultural plurality. The European Monument Challenge seeks to herald a new era of monument culture that visibly narrates Europe as a community of shared values rooted in diverse regional traditions.

The European Monument Challenge would invite cities across Europe to design and build their own European monuments, and thus fostering reflection on their connection to Europe and its values. The monument must be a permanent physical structure located in a public space. Its artistic form would be deliberately open: classical architecture, modern design, or abstract sculpture are all feasible. Essential to the initiative is that it is developed by local citizens, for instance through participatory design competitions or citizen consultations. Each monument should symbolise a specific regional identity, tradition, or historical reference while illustrating its connection to European values, such as democracy, human dignity, solidarity, and the rule of law. This would embed European identity in everyday surroundings.

The competition would also be linked to a website where European citizens could vote for their favourite project. To further connect people, visitors could travel the Monument Route and collect digital or physical stamps at each site. Every year, a different monument would be replicated and placed in front of the European Parliament to ensure that the European feel is brought to the communities and to remind Brussels that Europe consists of a plethora of local stories. These replicas would form a permanent yet changing installation in front of the Parliament building, symbolising that Europe is made up of its regions.

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