

WINTER 2018

EUROPEAN YOUNG LEADERS (EYL40)

TO VOTE OR NOT TO VOTE - A QUESTION OF LEADERSHIP?

REPORT



The European Young Leaders (EYL40) programme led by Friends of Europe is a unique, inventive and multi-stakeholder programme that aims to promote a European identity by engaging the continent's most promising talents in initiatives that will shape Europe's future.

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



Co-funded by the
Europe for Citizens Programme
of the European Union

The European Young Leaders (EYL40) programme led by Friends of Europe is a unique, inventive and multi-stakeholder programme that aims to promote a European identity by engaging the continent's most promising talents in initiatives that will shape Europe's future. The programme was initially conceived in partnership with EuropaNova.

With the support of


John S. Latsis
Public Benefit Foundation

Fondazione
CARIPLO
TUTE SERVARE MUNIFICENT DONARE - 1916



Without decisive action, the allure of populism and apathy among mainstream voters risks turning next year's European Parliament election into another stepping stone for anti-European nationalism.

The last EP elections in 2014 were the first where turnout increased. However, the rise was tiny and at just 43.09%, participation remained dangerously low – given that moderate, middle-of-the-road voters are harder to mobilise than those with more radical views.

It is essential to find new ways to engage the mainstream. Throughout 2018, European Young Leaders have been seeking solutions to defend European values and inspire a fightback at the upcoming May election.

At their spring seminar in Warsaw, European Young Leaders listened to an inspirational message from Holocaust survivor Marian Turski on the dangers of taking freedom for granted. That encounter produced recommendations ranging from wider participatory budgets that give voters control over public spending to scaling up political education at an early age.

The autumn gathering in Malta debated concrete examples from Switzerland, the Netherlands and Malta of citizens and politicians thwarting populist ambitions by standing up for liberal values. It produced calls for more direct democracy and ethical social media campaigns.

This year's European Young Leaders & Alumni meeting in Brussels drew on those debates with a focus on the EP elections, searching for means to persuade more Europeans to vote, and to vote for politicians that support a European future.

They got plenty of food for thought the previous day at Friends of Europe's annual State of Europe roundtable that produced concrete ideas on how Europe can win back public support with a social contract for the 21st century that addresses voter concerns over migration, sustainable growth, welfare and security.

A poll released at the State of Europe conference had mixed messages. It showed 64% of citizens are not convinced life would be worse without the EU, but also that 90% of EU citizens feel the Union should be more than just a single market.

The survey serves as input for #EuropeMatters, a 12-month project by Friends of Europe bringing together business leaders, policymakers and civil society representatives. It will culminate in January 2019 in a call for action ahead of the European elections and policy recommendations for the incoming EU leadership.

64% of citizens are not convinced life would be worse without the EU, but also that 90% of EU citizens feel the Union should be more than just a single market



“We need to increase diversity and try to talk to others that have differing views and try to involve members of the public who may not initially have an interest, or not have any knowledge about politics, that’s very important”

Iain Couzin

Chair of Biodiversity and Collective Behaviour, University of Konstanz

To discuss how the EU can refocus on voters’ concerns and get more people to the ballot box, Young Leaders, past and present, put their heads together with a European Commissioner, a media watchdog, a behavioural scientist and leaders of an upstart European political movement.

Their brainstorm considered options to inspire citizens jaded by politics as usual; the need to engage more women in the election; the right tools for fighting fake news and possibilities for forging new voting alternatives to the extremist surge.

There was broad agreement on the need to reach beyond the politically committed to those people who are not normally engaged and to overcome polarisation with dialogue.

“We need to increase diversity and try to talk to others that have differing views and try to involve members of the public who may not initially have an interest, or not have any knowledge about politics, that’s very important,” said [Iain Couzin](#), Chair of Biodiversity and Collective Behaviour, University of Konstanz.

“We really need an increased involvement of the public, a new involvement of the public,” he added. “It’s very important to have the uninformed and inexperienced part of the populace involved.”

Couzin provided a raft of evidence showing the growing polarisation of attitudes across political divides both in Europe and the United States. “We don’t talk to people with different political views, we can’t see eye-to-eye,” he said, calling for increased dialogue among people with opposing political viewpoints.

Participants concluded that relying on cold facts and hard economic data won’t overcome public indifference. Instead, campaigners must engage voters on an emotional level to show how Europe defends their values and improves their everyday lives.

“Not all the people are interested in politics, but everyone is interested in having a good future,” stated [Věra Jourová](#), EU Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality.

Rebuilding trust is essential, Jourová insisted.

“Be brave, authentic and tell the people the truth,” she said. “That sounds primitive, but people do not trust anymore, because they have been disappointed so many times.”

[Mikko Salo](#), Founder and Director of fact-checking service Faktabaari and member of the EU’s High-Level Expert Group on Fake News and Online Disinformation, said extremists made electoral advances by appealing to people’s gut feelings.

“We have to be very much aware that the facts are damn important, but they don’t mobilise people,” he said. “Hate speech encourages emotions. It’s a very powerful tool to put people against each other.”

Better engagement with female voters in the run up to the European elections will boost voter participation and improve political dialogue, speakers agreed. Jourová urged political parties to select more female candidates and ensure women get their fair share of key institutional roles.

“Let’s have more women in politics and decision-making positions,” she said, adding that women are better at finding compromise and dialogue.

“If there are more women, I honestly believe there will be less machismo in relations, more dialogue and less polarisation,” the Commissioner added.

Those arguments are backed up by facts, explained Couzin. “All of the scientific evidence actually suggests that more women in a group make better collective decisions across the board,” he said. “Why is that the case? Because women actually let each other talk ... you will get better collective decisions, you’ll naturally get that from having more women in a group.”

Salo focused his talk on methods for combatting fake news and creating a fair discussion in the campaign for the upcoming elections. He called for greater efforts to counter the “three Ps” of populism, propaganda and polarisation.

Academics and researchers should be enabled to take a closer look at hate speech and fake news; support is needed for embattled independent journalism; humour should be wielded as a powerful tool against pumped up populists; fact-checking can be taught in schools. The focus should not be on the far-right message, but on preventing misinformation.

“We really need to know what is happening in Europe. You have to empower European research,” Salo argued. “The idea is to inspire more action,” he added. “Europe hasn’t had its fact-checking moment yet ... there will be some action in regard to the European elections, I’m sure.”

As well as devoting resources to fact-checking in the media, he said more had to be done to improve public awareness and education so people can detect and dismiss fake news. “We need to empower our brains for critical thinking and engagement,” he said.

Couzin explained how Donald Trump and other populists are able to garner support through fake news. “False information spreads faster and further on Twitter networks,” he said. “Why is that? False information tends to be more surprising ... and surprising information tends to propagate more quickly and further.”



“Be brave, authentic and tell the people the truth. That sounds primitive, but people do not trust anymore, because they have been disappointed so many times”

Věra Jourová

EU Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality



“Hate speech encourages emotions. It’s a very powerful tool to put people against each other”

Mikko Salo

Founder and Director of fact-checking service Faktabaari and member of the EU’s High-Level Expert Group on Fake News and Online Disinformation



“Stop focusing on extreme-right politics or populism ... It’s been done so many times and clearly it doesn’t work”

Colombe Cahen-Salvador

Co-founder and European Policy Leader of Volt

While recognising free-speech concerns, Jourová explained that the European Commission’s efforts to crack down on Internet hate speech are essential. “I am absolutely convinced that we are doing the right thing. We must get back to basics, that the call for killing and violence must be prohibited,” she said. “Freedom must not be abused for such a bad purpose.”

Giving details of the scale, origin and targets of online hate speech, the Commissioner warned that leaving it unchecked would lead to an inevitable spill-over into real world violence. “Where there is no rule of law in digital world, there is the jungle; if that continues, there will be the jungle in real world.”

Opinions were split over whether Internet threats, hate speech and trolling meant online anonymity should be prohibited.

“What’s required here is some sort of identification process ... so that there is a traceability process in the background,” argued EYL alumna [Mary Fitzgerald](#), Researcher and Consultant in Europe-Mediterranean Affairs and Libya.

Her fellow young leader alumnus [Ayman Mhanna](#) disagreed, insisting that governments should be allowed to exploit traceability to target citizens. “The idea of ending anonymity would lead to massive numbers, tens of thousands and hundreds of thousands of people, being put at unprecedented risk ... we really need to be very careful,” said Mhanna, Executive Director of the Samir Kassir Foundation which promotes cultural and media freedom in the Middle East.

NEW OPTIONS FOR VOTING

The fightback against populism should not fall into the trap of constantly reacting to extremist narratives. Pro-Europe forces need to promote a positive vision of Europe that inspires voters, said [Colombe Cahen-Salvador](#), Co-founder and European Policy Leader of Volt – a new pan-European movement hoping to win seats in the EP election on a reform ticket.

“Stop focusing on extreme-right politics or populism ... It’s been done so many times and clearly it doesn’t work,” she said, adding that it will not be possible to convince voters to vote for Europe simply because others are voting against it.

Her party wants to win over voters with a new approach. “By saying there’s a new way of doing things, of applying European values, I believe you motivate more people to come and vote than by trying to get them to vote against a party that is typically seen as populist.”

Using straightforward, cliché-free language will reach more people, said Cahen-Salvador. “Whenever I read European news, it’s so

complicated. I take hours to get it,” she complained. “You don’t have to use complicated words. Using facts that are sexy will stick in people’s minds ... stop using traditional EU rhetoric, which is deeply annoying to anybody who is not part of the EU bubble.”

There were doubts over the idea of forging some form of pan-European identity politics to counter the nativism of right-wing populists. “Creating nationalism for the European Union would be extremely counter-productive,” argued Cahen-Salvador. However, her colleague [Andrea Venzon](#), Co-Founder and President of Volt, pointed to widespread support for Europe taking on a more muscular global role. “The message of a strong Europe with a voice on the international stage, resonates a lot with voters,” Venzon said.

In response to the pressing call for action ahead of the European Parliament elections, the leaders agreed to start work immediately setting up platforms for pan-European communications on key issues such as climate change, migration and job creation.

“We don’t have the time anymore for debates. We need to act, and we need to do it now,” declared 2018 European Young Leader [Diane Binder](#), Vice-President Suez Environment, France.

Harnessing the tools of the start-up world through calls for innovative ideas and acceleration programmes to turn ideas into concreted projects was identified as the way forward. “We should be a hub of innovation toward Europe,” said João Wengorovius Meneses, EYL alumnus and General Manager of HUB 2050.



**“We don’t have the time
anymore for debates.
We need to act, and we
need to do it now”**

Diane Binder
Vice-President Suez Environment, France



1. Andrea Venzon, Co-Founder & President Volt
2. Monica Frassoni, Co-Chair of the European Green Party
3. Zanda Kalnina-Lukaševica, Parliamentary State Secretary for EU Affairs in Latvia and European Young Leader alumnus
4. Denis Roio, Founder of Dyne in The Netherlands and European Young Leader alumnus & Wouter Verschelden, CEO of NewsMonkey in Belgium and European Young Leader alumnus
5. Anne-Marie Imafidon, CEO Stemettes in UK and European Young Leader alumnus
6. Ayman Mhanna, CEO of Samir Kassir Foundation in Lebanon and European Young Leader alumnus
7. Alberto Alemanno, Jean Monnet Professor of EU Law, HEC Paris, Founder of The Good Lobby and European Young Leader alumnus
8. Clémentine Forissier, Editor-in-Chief at Contexte in France and European Young Leader alumnus
9. Edoardo Camilli, Co-Founder & CEO, Hozint - Horizon Intelligence in Belgium and European Young Leader alumnus
10. Imen Ben Mohamed, Member of Parliament in Tunisia and European Young Leader alumnus



LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Jamila Aanzi

UN Women's Representative, Dutch Women's Council, The Netherlands

Alberto Alemanno

Jean Monnet Professor of EU Law, HEC Paris, Founder of The Good Lobby

Guillem Anglada-Escude

Reader in Astronomy, Queen Mary University of London, United Kingdom

Imen Ben Mohamed

Member of Parliament, Vice-Chair of the committee on Economic and Financial Affairs, Tunisia

Diane Binder

Vice-President, Suez Environment, France

Hala Bugaighis

Co-Founder & Executive Director, Jusoor, Libya

Malcolm Byrne

Head of Communications, Higher Education Authority, Ireland

Colombe Cahen-Salvador

Co-Founder & European Policy Lead, VOLT

Geert Cami

Co-Founder and Managing Director, Friends of Europe

Edoardo Camilli

Co-Founder & CEO, Hozint - Horizon Intelligence, Belgium

Meg Chang

Politics & Government Outreach Manager, Facebook

Iain Couzin

Director of Department, Collective Behavior University of Konstanz, Germany

Xavier Damman

Co-Founder & CEO, OpenCollective, United States of America

Lukasz Dziekonski

Head of the Management Board, Marguerite Fund 2020 for Energy, Climate Change and Infrastructure, Poland

Agnieszka Dziemianowicz-Bak

Member of the National Board, RAZEM, Poland

Mary Fitzgerald

Researcher and Consultant in Euro-Mediterranean Affairs and Lybia, Ireland

Clémentine Forissier

Editor-in-Chief, Contexte, France

Monica Frassoni

President, European Alliance to Save Energy (EU-ASE)

Markus Freiburg

Founder & Managing Director, Financing Agency for Social Entrepreneurship (FASE), Germany

Nathalie Furrer

Director of Programmes and Operations, Friends of Europe

Alessandro Fusacchia

Member of Parliament, Secretary of Movimenta, Italy

Francesco Galtieri

International Affairs Advisor, Italy

Jakob Haesler

Business development, Skintifique, Co-Founder, Project Alloy, France

Anne-Marie Imafidon

Chief Executive Officer, Stemettes, United Kingdom

Vera Jourová

EU Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality

Zanda Kalnina-Lukaševica

Parliamentary State Secretary for EU Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Latvia

Dharmendra Kanani

Director of Insights, Friends of Europe

Monika Ladmanová

Adviser, Cabinet of EU Commissioner for Justice, Consumers & Gender Equality Vera Jourová

Xavier Prats Monné

Special Advisor, Teach for All

João Wengorovius Meneses

General Manager, HUB 2050, Portugal

Ayman Mhanna

Executive Director, Samir Kassir Foundation, Lebanon

Jonathan Murray

Managing Director Designate, Friends of Europe

Lindsey Nefesh-Clarke

Founder & Managing Director, Women's
Worldwide Web (W4), France

Adam Nyman

Director, Debating Europe

Eduardo Portal Martin

Conductor, Antares Ensemble, Spain

Denis Roio

Founder, Dyne.org, The Netherlands

Mikko Salo

Founder, Faktabaari, Finland

Andrea Venzon

Co-Founder & President, VOLT

Wouter Verschelden

Chief Executive Officer, NewsMonkey



Friends of Europe

Connect. Debate. Change.

+32 2 893 98 18

info@friendsofeurope.org

friendsofeurope.org

Friends of Europe is a leading think-tank that connects people, stimulates debate and triggers change to create a more inclusive, sustainable and forward-looking Europe.