



EUROPEAN YOUNG LEADERS
BRUSSELS SEMINAR

Is Europe Alice in Wonderland?

SPRING 2023

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.

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Introduction

Despite the seminar title's reference to the fictional Victorian girl who finds herself lost in a whimsical world, **stories of powerful contemporary women in lands of grim reality held centre stage at the European Young Leaders (EYL40) seminar** held in Brussels on 9–11 March.

An exiled activist fighting for women's rights in Taliban-held Afghanistan, a Crimean Tartar at the forefront of Ukraine's resistance to Putin's invasion and a campaigner to save Somali girls from the horrors of genital mutilation were among potent female voices heard during the three-days of talks at Friends of Europe's TownHall Europe centre in the heart of Brussels' European neighbourhood.

Lewis Carroll's curious child featured as the European Young Leaders (EYL40) pondered **whether the European Union shares Alice's sense of distorted perception and needs to urgently regain a grip on reality** as it seeks to emerge from a rabbit hole filled with dangers infinitely more perplexing than the bloodthirsty royals, anthropomorphic beasts or Mad Hatter tea parties of Carroll's novels.

The climate emergency, tech threats to democracy, supply chain frailties, migration dilemmas, polarised politics, Russian aggression, increasingly confrontational relations with China, the fight against

corruption and the rise of domestic autocrats were just some of the challenges discussed at the Brussels event.

Huddled to search for effective responses, the EYL40 were able to deploy a unique blend of experiences, coming from 32 countries and with diverse backgrounds in politics, business, civil society, academia, science, technology, journalism, fashion and culture.

Now in its second decade, the EYL40 programme every year selects talented Europeans aged 40 and under, who connect with alumni from previous years for a series of intense brainstorming sessions. After opening to the Western Balkans a few years ago, the programme was expanded this year to include Ukraine.

By connecting young leaders, the programme builds bonds across nationalities, areas of expertise and political viewpoints. It enables young leaders to engage with decision-makers to gain an appreciation of leadership constraints and policy challenges. The EYL40 programme aims to stimulate change through creative responses to Europe's challenges and promote inspirational role models able to rebuild ties between citizens and policymakers.



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1. **Anna Watt**, Programme Officer on Finance and Capital Market Transformation, Laudes Foundation;
2. **Rim-Sarah Alouane**, Legal Scholar and PhD Candidate in Comparative Law, University Toulouse-Capitole and 2023 EYL40; **Ayman Mhanna**, Executive Director, Samir Kassir Foundation and 2017 MENA YL
3. **Fernande Raine**, CEO and Founder, The History Co:Lab
4. **Darren Jones**, Chair of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, House of Commons and 2023 EYL40



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John S. Latsis
Public Benefit Foundation

The John S. Latsis Public Benefit Foundation was established in 2005 with a mission of continuing the philanthropic legacy of the late Greek entrepreneur John S. Latsis and his dedication to societal development, with a particular focus on his homeland, Greece. Since its establishment, the Foundation has sought to, on the one hand, address current pressing social challenges and, on the other hand, implement initiatives committed to creating a society of equal opportunities, meritocracy and progress. Within this framework of operation, the Foundation both designs and manages its annual targeted programs and provides grants to nonprofit organisations, across a wide range of fields including education & skills, innovation & sustainable development, social action & solidarity. An engaged funding approach guides the Foundation's activities, whereby all work is done in close collaboration with civil society partners and key players within the relevant issue areas, to maximize social impact. An additional part of the Foundation's activities is the operation of the Neraida Floating Museum, the objective of which is, among other things, to promote the country's shipping, maritime and business history, through activities of an educational, informative and scientific nature. The John S. Latsis Public Benefit Foundation is a member of the European Foundation Centre.

Recommendations

The EYL40 spring seminar produced a range of ideas to be taken forward by the young leaders' network and discussed with European decision-makers, including:

- The West must maintain and increase support for Ukraine's war effort, post-war reconstruction and Euro-Atlantic ambitions.
- In addition to infrastructure, European funding needs to focus more on support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), training and education.
- Increase trans-Atlantic cooperation on tech regulation that ensures a balance between respect for free speech and the defence of democracy.
- NGOs should diversify funding, reaching out to the private sector and shedding fear of EU bureaucratic barriers, to build communities of power and influence.
- The EU should appoint a chief science officer as part of efforts to step up science education and communication.
- Revise migration strategies, with increased support for development and institution building in Africa; expanded legal migration routes; and effective integration policies that get migrants into employment and avoid ghettoisation, while emphasising respect for the cultures of the incomers and native communities.
- Develop a Renewed Social Contract that promotes insightful, imaginative, inclusive and collaborative leadership and regenerates participatory democracy, especially given the upcoming European Parliament elections.
- Harness the power of social media and gaming to take the 'boring' out of education on the European project.
- Establish mechanisms to monitor the impact of tech innovations while they are still in the research and development stages, rather than seeking to regulate them after they are deployed.
- Europe's politicians need to reconnect with the base and reach out to voters to restore trust; embrace transparency on finances and lobby contacts; and consider external audits of party activities.
- European funding for the green transition is insufficient. More effort is needed to reduce supply chain dependencies, for example, on Chinese minerals and materials and more work is needed on battery recycling. The EU has to rethink industrial, competition and debt policies to keep up with global rivals.
- Promote the role of women in defence and security institutions, as well as in peace processes.



1. **Žan Menart**, Co-Founder and CEO, Smart Optometry and 2023 EYL40; **Hekuran Murati**, Kosovar Minister of Finance, Labour and Transfers and 2023 EYL40; **Klen Jaarats**, Director for EU Affairs, Government of Estonia and 2015-2016 EYL40
2. **Yuriy Vulkovsky**, Independent expert and consultant and 2014 EYL40; **Bart Staszewski**, LGBTQI+ Activist, Founder and CEO, The Basta Foundation and 2023 EYL40
3. **Katharina Unger**, Founder and CEO, Livin Farms AgriFood GmbH and 2023 EYL40; **Oana-Silvia Toiu**, Chair of the Committee on Youth and Sports, Chamber of Deputies and 2023 EYL40; **Anne-Sophie Rolland**, Director of Heritage and Collections, Musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac and 2020-2021 EYL40



Brave and invincible

“We started to build our own world for ourselves. We never thought that we would end up back in a world where being a girl is a crime.”

Those stark words from **Zarifa Ghafari**, Founder of Assistance and Promotion for Afghan Women Organisation (APAW) and former mayor of Maidan Shahr, stunned the group as its first sessions got underway the day after International Women’s Day.

“Our motto – of every single Ukrainian woman – is that everything is possible [...] and we have a strong feeling that the moment and history are in our hands.”

Emine Dzhaparova, Ukrainian First Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and 2023 EYL40

However, despite her assertion that the West had thrown Afghan women “into the fire” by abandoning them to the brutality of Taliban rule, Ghafari’s message was one of hope thanks to women’s resistance, both in exile and, with incredible bravery, within the country.

“The beautiful thing that still remains is that the entire fight, the entire struggle [...] is all led by women,” she said. “Whenever you hear women of Afghanistan, the word victim is being added [...] Despite that, we are symbols of resistance, of courage and bravery.”

In Ukraine, too, women are playing a crucial role in resisting Moscow’s vicious campaign to snuff out freedom and democracy.

Emine Dzhaparova, Ukrainian First Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and 2023 EYL40, told stories of “brave and invincible” women in the vanguard of her country’s struggle. They included Ruslana Danilina, a 19-year-old volunteer who lost a leg in combat in February, and Yana Rykhlitska, an IT-worker-turned-paramedic known as

the ‘soliders’ angel’ for saving wounded on the frontlines, who was killed on 2 March in Bakhmut at the age of 29.

“Their lesson is that you should never give up,” said Dzhaparova, a member of Ukraine’s Crimea Tartar community. “Our motto – of every single Ukrainian woman – is that everything is possible [...] and we have a strong feeling that the moment and history are in our hands.”

She too had a message of hope and an appeal for continued support. “We will arrive at the country that we dream of,” she told the group. “I believe that this country that we dream of will happen with your help.”

While women are prominent among Ukraine’s defenders and Afghanistan’s resistance and have been key to peace processes from Liberia to Northern Ireland, the seminar was reminded that only recently have they risen to hold significant positions in Western defence and security structures.

“Nobody was talking about gender issues. It was really very low down on the priority list, and it has only really taken flight within the past ten years,” explained **Christine Cheng**, Senior Lecturer in International Relations at King’s College London. “It has been quite a phenomenal thing to see happen.”



Emine Dzhaparova, Ukrainian First Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and 2023 EYL40

Although women now make up almost one-third of NATO defence ministers, work still needs to be done to keep gender issues at the fore within the alliance. “This is a very male-dominated environment. It is a cultural challenge that you have to focus on every day,” said **Irene Fellin**, NATO Secretary General’s Special Representative for Women, Peace and Security. “We integrate a gender perspective into everything we do.”

“It’s not about doing everything; it’s about doing something”

Camilla Appelgren, Chief Patrolling Ranger at the Heritage Parks Federation in Malta and 2023 EYL40

Over dinner, hosted at Brussels’ BELvue Museum in partnership with the United Kingdom Mission to the European Union, Dzshaparova was joined by two female speakers with their own inspiring stories of resilience.

A child survivor of female genital mutilation (FGM) in Somalia, **Ifrah Ahmed**, Founder of the Ifrah Foundation and 2023 EYL40, came to Ireland as a refugee from civil

war and was shocked to discover the practice continued among the Somali community there. “I felt that I had to do something; this is how I became a campaigner. I don’t want girls who are born and raised in Ireland to go through what I went through. So, I started fighting.”

Despite death threats, Ahmed persisted, and her lobbying of Irish politicians led to the outlawing of FGM in the country in 2012. Following that success, she has taken the campaign back to her homeland. “I felt that if I could do something in Ireland, I could do something in Somalia.”

Camilla Appelgren, Chief Patrolling Ranger at the Heritage Parks Federation in Malta and 2023 EYL40, also faced death threats when she began her campaign to tackle poaching, illegal waste dumping and other threats to nature on the island. “I took the turn from being the crazy woman picking up trash on the streets to sitting on a clifftop monitoring environmental crime [...] and I’m loving it,” she said. Even small steps are important to bring about positive change, Appelgren added: “It’s not about doing everything; it’s about doing something.”



Zarifa Ghafari, Founder of Assistance and Promotion for Afghan Women Organisation (APAW) and former mayor of Maidan Shahr



1. **Camilla Applegren**, Chief Patrolling Ranger, Heritage Parks Federation in Malta and 2023 EYL40
2. **Ifrah Ahmed**, Founder, Ifrah Foundation and 2023 EYL40
3. **Irene Fellin**, NATO Secretary General Special Representative for Women, Peace and Security, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO); **Emine Dzhaparova**, Ukrainian First Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and 2023 EYL40; **Christine Cheng**, Senior Lecturer in International Relations, Kings College London; **Zarifa Ghafari**, Afghan activist and former mayor of Maidan Shahr, Founder, Assistance and Promotion for Afghan Women Organization (APAW) and 2023 EYL40; **Mary Fitzgerald**, Non-resident scholar, Middle East Institute, Trustee of Friends of Europe and 2013 EYL40
4. **Djina Dabovic**, Regional Vice Consul for Montenegro, Serbia, Albania and Kosovo, British Embassy to Montenegro; **Anne Kjaer Bathel**, Founder and Managing Director, ReDI School of Digital Integration and 2020-2021 EYL40





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The European Commission Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) programme

The Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) programme was launched in 2021 and will run for seven years until 2027. It was created along with the 2021-2027 Justice programme under the Justice, Rights and Values Fund.

The CERV programme seeks to support and develop open, rights-based, democratic, equal and inclusive societies based on the rule of law. That includes a vibrant and empowered civil society, encouraging people's democratic, civic and social participation and cultivating the rich diversity of European society, based on our common values, history and memory.

The CERV programme has four pillars:

1. Equality, Rights and Gender Equality – promoting rights, non-discrimination, equality (including gender equality), and advancing gender and non-discrimination mainstreaming
2. Citizens' engagement and participation – promoting citizens engagement and participation in the democratic life of the Union, exchanges between citizens of different Member States, and raising awareness of the common European history
3. Daphne – fight violence, including gender-based violence and violence against children
4. Union values – protect and promote Union values

Civil society organisations active at local, regional, national and transnational level, as well as other stakeholders, can apply to receive CERV funding for initiatives aimed at citizens' engagement, equality for all and the protection and promotion of rights and EU values.

Go ask Alice

In Wonderland, Alice encountered altered and distorted perceptions. In Brussels, the EYL40 examined the contention that the European Union may be suffering from something similar, unsure of its dimension as a world player and the scale of its potential to handle challenges like climate change or accelerated technological, economic, demographic and geopolitical change.

“There is a moment in [Alice’s] life with a real sense of mental disjunction, a sense of not understanding who she is,” said **Dharmendra Kanani**, Chief Operating Officer and Chief Spokesperson of Friends of Europe. “Europe, we feel, is in a similar position. Is it too big or too small? Does it know where it is going?”

Take the fight against climate change. Europe has long viewed itself as the leading player, but despite its Green Deal, the EU risks being overtaken by the United States in funding for the clean energy transition, while China plays an increasingly central role in green technology.



Andrea Barber Lazcano, Co-Founder and CEO, RatedPower and 2023 EYL40

“We’ve never talked so much about transition [...] but we don’t put up enough money just to deploy the existing solutions,” cautioned **Thomas Dermine**, Belgian State Secretary for Scientific Policy, Recovery Programme and Strategic Investments and 2020-2021 EYL40. “We need to change the budgetary rules of the EU. As long as we don’t modify those rules [...] we will only be talking about energy change, but we won’t do anything.”

Speakers argued for a more focused industry policy, increased funding and a rethink of market structures. Europe needs to reconsider its aversion to debt, promote green investment and revise procurement procedures. In the current geopolitical situation, such measures are essential.

“The Green Deal has a big risk of becoming a buy-from-China deal. We are replacing Russian oil with batteries: 75% come from China, rare earths [...] 97% of them are refined in China,” warned **André Loeseckrug-Pietri**, Chairman and Scientific Director at the Joint European Disruptive Initiative (JEDI) and 2013 EYL40. “I’m not so sure that we are not actually turning one dependency into another one.”

“We’ve never talked so much about transition [...] but we don’t put up enough money just to deploy the existing solutions”

Thomas Dermine, Belgian State Secretary for Scientific Policy, Recovery Programme and Strategic Investments and 2020-2021 EYL40

The EYL40 Class of 2023 had plenty of ideas for improving things. **Andrea Barber Lazcano**, Co-Founder and CEO of RatedPower, a Spanish company harnessing ground-breaking technology to maximise the potential of photovoltaic plants, stressed the importance of boosting EU funding for SMEs; and **Monika Herceg**, writer, editor and 2023 EYL40, urged an increased focus on battery recycling, an area in which China is moving ahead of Europe.

Education and communication have been neglected in Europe and have to be stepped up to ensure public support for climate actions, contended **Maria Leptin**, President of the European Research Council (ERC). As an example, she pointed to how renewable energy potential in northern Germany is limited due to public opposition to the cables needed to carry power to the south.

“Politics could do a lot to educate better and allow things that could be done immediately with the known solutions that we have,” she said. “Science communication is not something we are working on in Europe [...] Science is the way to progress and we need to convince people that we need progress.”





1. **Jane Burston**, Executive Director, Clean Air Fund and 2015-2016 EYL40
2. EYL40 suggestions to promote EU energy sovereignty
3. **Tijana Tamburic**, Co-Founder, Female Narratives and 2023 EYL40; **Katharina Unger**, Founder and CEO, Livin Farms AgriFood GmbH and 2023 EYL40
4. **Monika Herceg**, Editor, Writer, Moderator, Culture Programmes Coordinator, Fraktura Publishing House and 2023 EYL40
5. **Dharmendra Kanani**, Chief Operating Officer and Spokesperson, Friends of Europe





1. **Fabio Mancini**, Supermodel and 2023 EYL40
2. **Tijana Tamburic**, Co-Founder, Female Narratives and 2023 EYL40; **Camilla Appelgren**, Chief Patrolling Ranger, The Heritage Parks Federation and 2023 EYL40
3. **Darren Jones**, Chair of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, House of Commons and 2023 EYL40; **Katarzyna Nawrot**, Professor, Poznan University of Economics and Business, and member Committee of Future Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences and 2017 EYL40; **Eleanor Carter**, Research Director for the Government Outcomes Lab (GO Lab), Blavatnik School of Government - University of Oxford and 2023 EYL40; **European Research Council representative**; **Tiago Sa**, Co-Founder and CEO, Wisecrop and 2023 EYL40
4. **Eleanor Carter**, Research Director for the Government Outcomes Lab (GO Lab), Blavatnik School of Government - University of Oxford and 2023 EYL40; **Markus Freiburg**, Founder and CEO, Financing Agency for Social Entrepreneurship (FASE) and 2017 EYL40
5. **Bart Staszewski**, LGBTQI+ Activist, Founder and CEO, The Basta Foundation and 2023 EYL40; **Pawel Radziszewski**, Co-Founder and Chief Technology Officer, Nevomo and 2017 EYL40

Democracy at the Big Tech tea party

Like Carroll's White Rabbit, Europe is worried by its tardiness; in this case, the risk is being late for a very important date with a world transformed by new technology.

Not only do Europe's business models and market structures risk the continent falling further behind the US, China and emerging rivals in the race to develop artificial intelligence (AI) and other vital new technologies, but regulatory structures and education systems are leaving democracy increasingly open to threats from technology platforms.

“In many cases, Big Tech is – if not an enemy – at least an adversary,”

Bastian Obermayer, Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalist with *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and 2018 EYL40.

While the benefits of encouraging dialogue and information exchange were recognised, participants warned of threats posed by misinformation and the difficulties in regulating technology platforms that offer a stage for hate speech and demagoguery. “In many cases, Big Tech is – if not an enemy – at least an adversary,” said **Bastian Obermayer**, Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalist with *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and 2018 EYL40.

“We are really now at a turning point where the negatives are starting to outweigh the positives, and I really worry about democracy,” noted **Alice Stollmeyer**, Founder and Executive Director of Defend Democracy, a non-profit, civil society organisation based in Brussels and Washington.

She is one Alice with no delusions, at least about the challenges to democracy. Regulating technology when it's already “invented and developed and deployed at mass scale” is difficult given the big money behind Big Tech lobbying. Instead, regulators must be able to



Bastian Obermayer, Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalist with *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and 2018 EYL40

discuss the unintentional consequences of technologies while they are still at the design stage.

The threat is not limited to Europe. “We need to be much, much stricter and also trans-Atlantic,” Stollmeyer said. “Democracies should team up and really somehow disrupt the business models of the tech platforms because all the rest is rearranging the deckchairs on the Titanic.”

“Democracies should team up and really somehow disrupt the business models of the tech platforms”

Alice Stollmeyer, Founder and Executive Director of Defend Democracy

Without effective regulation combined with education on how individuals can guard against nefarious online activity, democracy's enemies can run amok. "In democracy, the freedom of speech is sacrosanct, but it is ironic that Mr Putin and other autocrats try to attack us by abusing freedom of speech," cautioned **Wojtek Talko**, Member of the Cabinet of Věra Jourová, Vice-President of the European Commission.

“How do we make Big Tech uncool?”

Rim-Sarah Alouane, Legal Scholar and PhD Candidate in Comparative Law, University Toulouse-Capitole and 2023 EYL40

“Our solution in Brussels is to say ‘heh, heh, we have to regulate’ but we cannot regulate everything,” Talko acknowledged. “Disinformation, for example [...] lying is not illegal, so we cannot necessarily regulate it.”

Bart Staszewski, LGBTQI+ activist and 2023 EYL40, cited a personal example. He recalled the ease with which online hate can be spread in Poland with apparent impunity for social media platforms. “We, as activists, have no powers to defend ourselves,” he told the group. “We need to regulate to make it more transparent for activists or the activists will burn out.”

With so many young people using social media as their primary news and information sources, the EYL40 pondered how to move beyond just regulation in order to turn them away from purveyors of misinformation and fake news. “How do we make Big Tech uncool?” asked **Rim-Sarah Alouane**, legal scholar and 2023 EYL40. “We need to make those companies not cool to use [...] The same way we did with cigarette companies we need to do with these companies, like through the education process.”

“We’ve become more hostile to outsiders, including experts, because of polarisation”

Nick Barron, Deputy CEO of MHP Group

In today's polarised political environment, however, educating citizens to spot fake news is not enough, noted **Nick Barron**, Deputy CEO of MHP Group, a London-based public affairs company. Those on the polarised edges of politics are good at spotting misinformation but are happy to share it anyway if “it helps their team win”, he explained, while hosting a workshop for the EYL40 on depolarisation, community engagement and leadership tools. “Polarisation [...] affects our willingness to respect expertise. We’ve become more hostile to outsiders, including experts, because of polarisation,” Barron said.



Anders Rødtvæs Bæksgaard Christensen, Political Editor, Politiken and 2023 EYL40



1

1. **Nick Barron**, Deputy CEO of MHP Group
2. **Rim-Sarah Alouane**, Legal Scholar and PhD Candidate in Comparative Law, University Toulouse-Capitole and 2023 EYL40
3. **Wojtek Talko**, Member of the Cabinet of Věra Jourová, Vice-President of the European Commission



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EU Elections 2024: Is Big Tech hampering or nurturing democracy?

WITH **Omer Lachgar**, Cyber & Journalist, Pritzker Prize-winning German Investigative Journalist and 2018 European Young Leader (EYL40) | **Bastian Obermayer**, Member of Cabinet of Věra Jourová, EU Commissioner for Justice, Consumer Protection and Equality | **Wojtek Talko**, Member of Cabinet of Věra Jourová, EU Commissioner for Justice, Consumer Protection and Equality | **Alice Stollmeyer**, Founder and Executive Director, Defense & Security | **Nicolas Brien**, Chairman of the European Startup Network and European Young Leader (EYL40) | MODERATED BY **Nick Barron**, Deputy CEO of MHP Group



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Constructive politics starts with accountability

The EYL40-led Constructive Politics initiative aims to counter polarisation by crafting a toolkit for newly elected politicians in the 2024 European Parliament elections and promoting constructive political dialogue. Politicians and journalists within the EYL40 group put their heads together in a roundtable held under Chatham House rules with members of the European Parliament (MEPs) to examine the work done so far and discuss the next steps, including a code of conduct to regain voter trust.

The imperative of changing the political culture in the Parliament has been given added urgency by the Qatargate scandal that has shaken Brussels' 'euro bubble' in recent weeks with allegations of cash bribes exchanged for political favours. That led to the session focusing on measures to confront corruption and rebuild confidence ahead of the 2024 elections.

"As politicians, we have lost part of the trust that was given us, not just the individuals who have broken the rules, but politicians as a whole," recognised one national lawmaker among the EYL40.

Several concrete ideas were put forward to help minimise the risk of corrupt practices. Through legislation or internal rules, parties should increase transparency with expanded financial disclosure and publishing the details of meetings with lobbyists. Best practices at the national level should be shared around Europe and brought into the European Parliament, while the enforcement of existing anticorruption measures has to be tightened.

"The problem of trust in politicians is a very serious one all across Europe"

Member of the European Parliament

"The European Union probably has one of the best frameworks for guaranteeing public ethics in the world," said **Alberto Alemanno**, Jean Monnet Professor in EU Law at HEC Paris, Founder of The Good Lobby and 2014

EYL40. "But we also saw that this system is not really enough to change the political culture within those political institutions [...] The weakest link is the European Parliament."

"As politicians, we have lost part of the trust that was given us, not just the individuals who have broken the rules, but politicians as a whole"

National lawmaker

Greater use of internal and external auditing of parties could be part of the solution, and a change in political culture is needed to encourage parties to root out and denounce 'bad apples' within their own ranks. -

Accountability is key. "The thing that bites in the real world, especially for people in power, is to know that there are consequences for their actions," stated another EYL40. "Powerful people need to know that they are going to lose their jobs if they misbehave."

To maintain the momentum behind the increased voter participation recorded at the last European elections in 2019 and prevent further slides to the political extremes, there was a broad consensus that mainstream politicians need to reconnect with the political base.

"Let's try to go out of the power political box," said one MEP. "The problem of trust in politicians is a very serious one all across Europe. More and more, the political class is perceived as a political caste."

Participatory democracy can play an important part in the process of rebuilding bridges between voters and politics, and reinvigorating democratic dynamics.

However, as the group heard in a session where they were joined by citizens of Brussels, care has to be taken.

“Citizens should be more involved in politics; everybody agrees,” said **Yves Dejaeghere**, Executive Director of the Federation for Innovation in Democracy (FIDE). “Politicians say ‘we want to listen more to citizens’ and citizens say politicians should definitely listen more.”

However, he cautioned that “citizen participation is becoming bit of a problem” because the organisation of participatory democracy is “still very often amateurish.” Participatory politics has to be inclusive and take care that those joining are fully representative. Instead, in some cases, male, older, highly educated and highly opinionated citizens tend to dominate. “If you say this is the voice of my society, that’s probably not what it is,” Dejaeghere noted.

The group looked at the case of Good Move Plan for improved mobility in the Brussels–Capital Region, where

restrictions on private car use and other measures led to powerful protests, despite some prior consultation. The EYL40 group and citizens from Brussels held roundtable sessions looking at how to avoid such pitfalls.

Dejaeghere also pointed to successful cases in which citizens’ assemblies have made a positive difference, from Ireland’s abortion debate, to resolving civil administration deadlock Bosnia and Herzegovina.

“Citizens should be more involved in politics”

Yves Dejaeghere, Executive Director of the Federation for Innovation in Democracy (FIDE)



Yves Dejaeghere, Executive Director of the Federation for Innovation in Democracy (FIDE)



1. **Malcom Byrne**, Senator, Seanad Eireann and 2013 EYL40

2. & 3. Moments captured with citizens during our What do citizens' want session?

4. **Ivan Lesay**, Head of Strategy and M&A, ESCO Slovensko and 2020-2021 EYL40

5. **Misbah Khan**, Member of the Committee on Digital Affairs, Bundestag and 2023 EYL40





1. **Katarzyna Nawrot**, Professor, Poznan University of Economics and Business, and member Committee of Future Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences and EYL40
2. **Laurent Hublet**, Co-Founder and Managing Director, BeCentral and 2023 EYL40
3. **Tahereh Pazouki**, Founder, Magrid Learning Solution and 2023 EYL40
4. **Federico Fabbrini**, Dublin City University and 2023 EYL40
5. **Olga Richterová**, Deputy Speaker, Chamber of Deputies and 2023 EYL40

Out of the rabbit hole

If Europe is to get out of the rabbit hole of post-truth politics, climate crisis and geopolitical chaos, leadership will be key. Finding new forms of leadership – that are insightful, imaginative, inclusive and collaborative – was why the EYL40 programme was founded.

“The key word is accountability. That is the most frequent key word taken up here”

Tiago Sá, Co-Founder and CEO of Wisecrop

“We all have our responsibility to modestly contribute where we can to make a better world [...] You don’t have a choice but to find new ways of collaboration between citizens, states, people in Europe,” said **Geert Cami**, Co-Founder and Secretary-General Friends of Europe. “We can’t afford any more to each work in our own silos and that is why we brought together this group of European Young Leaders because that’s how we hope to modestly contribute to a better world.”



Julian Kostov, award-winning Bulgarian actor, Founder and CEO of JupiterLights Media and 2023 EYL40

On the final day of the Brussels event, the EYL40 heard from **Philippe Van Parijs**, philosopher, economist and Professor at Belgium’s Université Catholique de Louvain (UCL). The free-flowing debate touched on many of the key challenges facing today’s Europe, from migration, to the impact of social media on politics, to Van Parijs’ assertion that a universal basic income is required to reduce the insecurity fuelling the world’s democratic malaise.

He reminded the group that most of them had enjoyed a privileged upbringing in a part of the world that enjoys a historically rare combination of peace, freedom and relative prosperity. With that privilege comes responsibility, Van Parijs asserted. “The fact that you have these privileges creates an obligation, a duty toward the community and a duty toward the world.”

Earlier, the EYL40 were tasked with putting their leadership attributes to the test by helping organisations solve real-life challenges: fixing weaknesses in the literacy of the European project by creating an impactful European civic education; developing a scalable business model to expand an education project aimed at integrating refugees and migrants in job markets; and building impact measurement data for peacebuilding. The EYL40’s diverse backgrounds resulted in original thinking on the issues, which was warmly welcomed by those seeking input.

“We need robustness and resilience and consistency, but also collaboration in making decisions, because nobody is an expert in everything”

Julian Kostov, award-winning Bulgarian actor, Founder and CEO of JupiterLights Media and 2023 EYL40

“Having that interdisciplinary in the group was super, super helpful,” said **Anne Kjaer Bathel**, herself a 2020–2021 EYL40, as well as the Founder and CEO of the ReDI School of Digital Integration, which works on refugee



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5

1. **Edoardo Camili**, Co-Founder & CEO, Hozint – Horizon Intelligence and 2017 EYL40; **Lukasz Dziekonski**, CEO and Founding Partner, Montis Capital Fund and 2015–2016 EYL40
2. **Yann Fleureau**, Co-Founder of Cardiologs and 2023 EYL40
3. **Philippe Van Parijs**, Philosopher, Economist and Professor at Belgium's Université Catholique de Louvain (UCL)
4. **Geert Cami**, Co-Founder and Secretary-General Friends of Europe
5. **Tiago Sá**, Co-Founder and CEO of Wisecrop and 2023 EYL40; **Dimitris Kalavros-Gousiou**, Co-Founder and General Partner, Velocity.Partners and 2023 EYL40
6. **Eleanor Carter**, Research Director of the Government Outcomes Lab (GO Lab) at the University of Oxford and 2023 EYL40



6



1. **Lindsay Croisdale-Appleby**, Ambassador, Mission of the United Kingdom to the EU
2. **Jakob Haesler**, Managing Director, Foxdixneuf and 2013 EYL40
3. **Vsevolod Chentsov**, Ambassador, Mission of Ukraine to the EU; **Emine Dzhamarova**, Ukrainian First Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and 2023 EYL40
4. **Nicolas Brien**, Chairman, European Startup Network and 2022 EYL40
5. **Raphaël Liégeois**, Career Astronaut, European Space Agency (ESA) and 2023 EYL40

Fondazione Cariplo is a grant making foundation based in Milan, Italy, that operates with the purpose of pursuing social good and promoting economic development. Since 1991 FC has awarded grants totalling € 3.6 billion and supported 35,600 projects in four main fields: Arts and Culture, Environment, Scientific Research, and in the Social realm.

The Foundation advances its mission by providing grants to projects solicited through calls for proposals, directly running in-house designed programmes, experimenting innovative funding approaches and tools and making impact investments consistent with its strategic priorities and the sectors it operates in.

The 2022 strategic framework sets out nine main goals towards which resources and efforts of the four philanthropic areas of the Foundation will be channelled: Demographic challenges, Climate change, Poverty, Work and Employability, Cultural participation, Scientific research, Community-based welfare, Social Housing, and Capacity building of the nonprofit sector.

Despite its regional roots and focus, Fondazione Cariplo has longstanding partnerships internationally and has been a member of Philea - Philanthropy Europe Association (formerly EFC) since 1998.



Gunita Kujikovska-Ķiesnere, Founder of the New Building School at Latvia's Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences and 2023 EYL40

labour market insertion in Germany and Denmark, and is seeking to expand. "Also, there is so much power in the networks and connections people have. Very much appreciate it and it will have impact for sure."

Her words were echoed by a range of participants, who welcomed the hands-on application of the diverse talents within the EYL40 programme. "It was something extremely practical, and something I would like to see much more in this group. It is really helping people in the community," said **Edoardo Camilli**, Co-Founder and CEO at Hozint - Horizon Intelligence, a threat intelligence solution provider based in Brussels, and 2017 EYL40.

That practical work led to a deeper debate on the nature of leadership, with participants underlining the importance of values such as accountability, empathy, responsibility and cooperation in forging the leadership that Europe needs.

"The key word is accountability. That is the most frequent key word taken up here," said **Tiago Sá**, Co-Founder and CEO of Wisecrop, a web-based operating system supporting farmers, and 2023 EYL40 from Portugal. "We have entrepreneurs here and we know that we are accountable for our teams and our decisions [...] Politicians are not usually accountable for their actions and decisions."

"We need robustness and resilience and consistency, but also collaboration in making decisions, because nobody is an expert in everything," added **Julian Kostov**, award-winning Bulgarian actor, Founder and CEO of

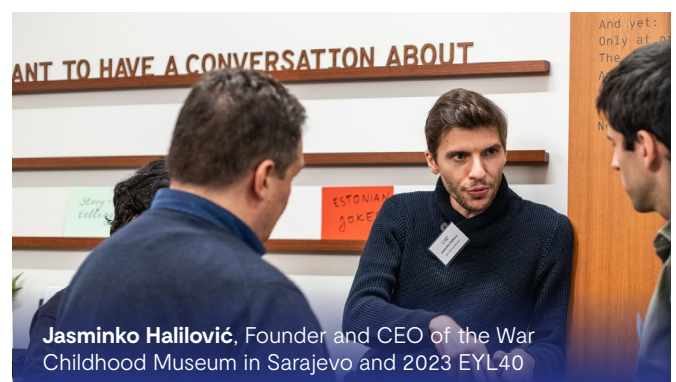
JupiterLights Media and 2023 EYL40. "We really have to learn to listen and learn by example."

The 2023 EYL40 group also got to hear from colleagues on the specific nature of their work in a series of roundtables that included: **Yann Fleureau**, Co-Founder of Cardiologs, explaining how to use AI as a force for good in tackling cardiovascular diseases; **Eleanor Carter**, Research Director of the Government Outcomes Lab (GO Lab) at the University of Oxford, outlining ways that innovative partnerships can lead to impactful public services; and the revolution in sustainable construction, presented by **Gunita Kujikovska-Ķiesnere**, Founder of the New Building School at Latvia's Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences.

Jasminko Halilović, Founder and CEO of the War Childhood Museum in Sarajevo, outlined the museum's role in explaining the consequences of war and the importance of peacebuilding. "Denial and conspiracy theories are a problem all over the world and they are touching so many histories," he said. "What is missing is more a soft approach where you connect people at the experience level, not only at the level of facts and numbers; bringing people to understanding by exposing them to personalities, not state histories, but personal histories."

“What is missing is more a soft approach where you connect people at the experience level, not only at the level of facts and numbers”

Jasminko Halilović, Founder and CEO of the War Childhood Museum in Sarajevo



Jasminko Halilović, Founder and CEO of the War Childhood Museum in Sarajevo and 2023 EYL40

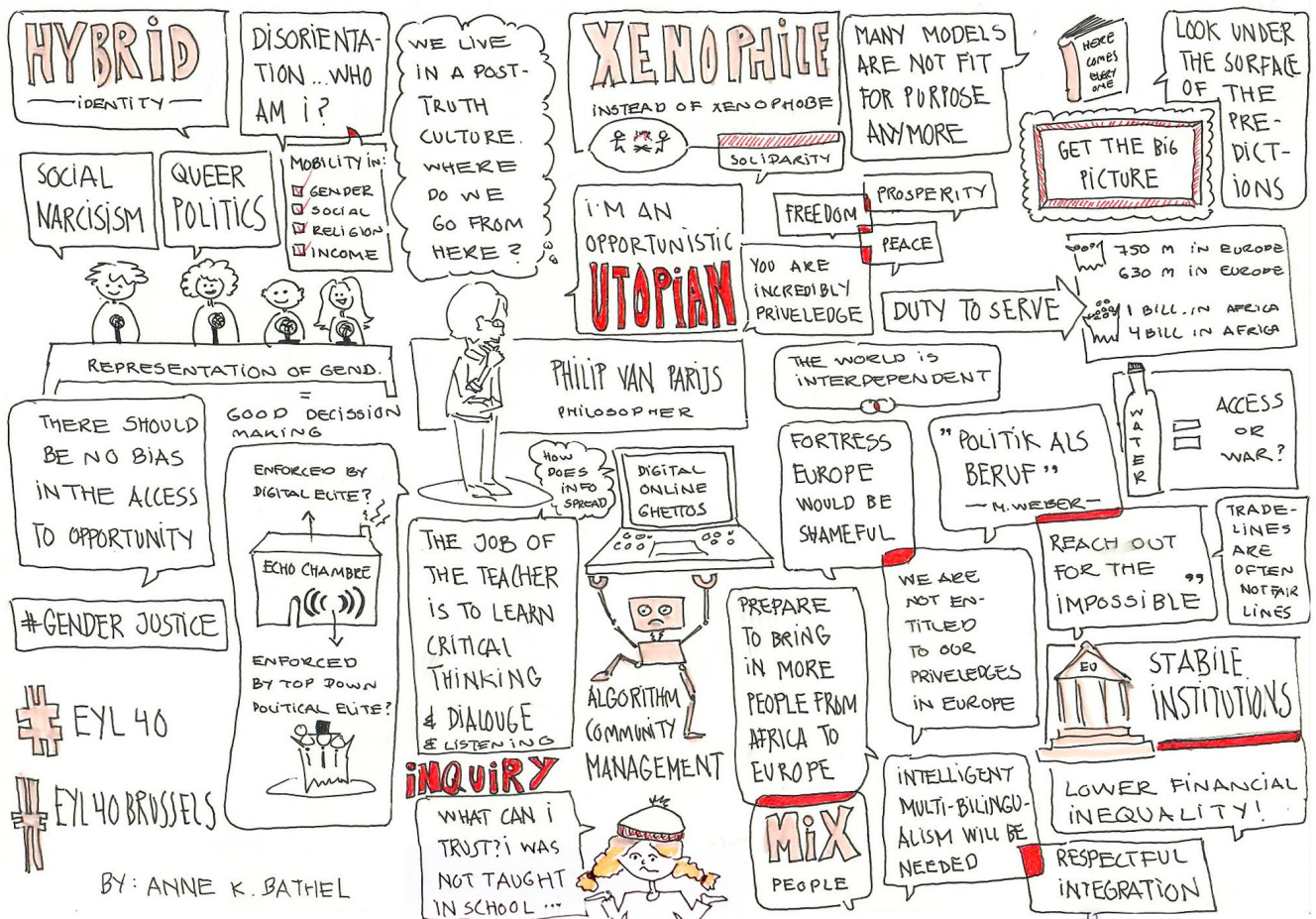
Conclusion

Strong, innovative and youthful leadership represents hope for the future of a Europe that has been battered by a string of crises and now confronts its bloodiest conflict since the Second World War.

“It was a collective and innovative leadership, often from young people, that enabled society actually to survive all of that,” **Lindsay Croisdale-Appleby**, Ambassador and Head of the UK Mission to the EU, told the group in reference to the COVID-19 pandemic. “The transformative leadership that we’re seeing in Ukraine remains a model for the world to admire in the face of adversity.”

The EYL40 programme, he added, “represents some of Europe’s most talented and most ambitious leadership [...] across all the different sectors.”

Reflecting on that ambition, 2023 EYL40 **Ifrah Ahmed** summed up the group’s spirit of resilience and hope in the face of a multitude of challenges: “If you believe in something and you want to make a difference, don’t ever give up.”



Sketche by Anne Kjaer Bathel

About the EYL40 programme



EYL40.org



[/EYL40](https://www.facebook.com/EYL40)



[@FriendsofEurope](https://twitter.com/FriendsofEurope)

Celebrating its 10th anniversary in 2022, 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 Young Leaders represent a promising European leadership from all over the continent and with a wide variety of backgrounds, including politics, business, civil society, academia, arts, science and the media. From trailblazing biochemists and budding political leaders, to dot-com entrepreneurs and NGO 'stars' who are shaping the social and environmental policies of tomorrow, the European Young Leaders are a unique community that crafts innovative responses to

European challenges and positively affects the lives of future generations.

Every year, they meet during two 3-day seminar that takes place in symbolic European cities, joined by decision-makers, stakeholders and key European actors, to discuss issues of common concern and develop concrete proposals and recommendations to tackle the challenges facing Europe and its citizens.

The relaxed tone and out-of-the-box nature of the EYL40 programme have brought about salient and open discussions that have facilitated the development of a strong network of committed Europeans.

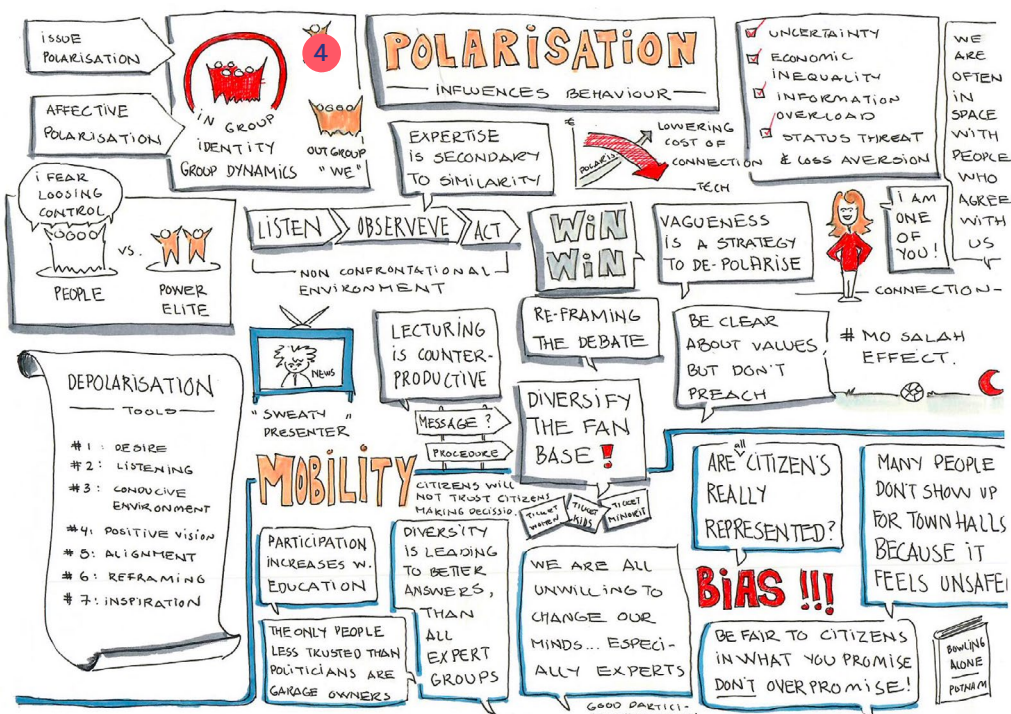


1. **Alberto Alemanno**, Jean Monnet Professor of EU Law, HEC Paris, Founder of the Good Lobby, Trustee of Friends of Europe and 2014 EYL40

2. **Giulia Pastorella**, Member of the Committee on Transport, Post and Telecommunications, Chamber of Deputies and 2023 EYL40

3. European Yong Leaders take a moment for a family photo

4. Sketche by Anne Kjaer Bathel





1. **Meghan Milloy**, Founder and Executive Director, Republican Women for Progress and 2017 North American YL
2. **Gustaf Göthberg**, Member of the Committee on Defence, National Parliament and 2023 EYL40
3. **Andre Loesekrug Pietri**, Chairman and Scientific Director, JEDI - Joint European Disruptive Initiative and 2015-2016 EYL40; **Edoardo Camilli**, Co-Founder & CEO, Hozint - Horizon Intelligence and 2017 EYL40; **Andrea Barber Lazcano**, Co-Founder and CEO, RatedPower and 2023 EYL40; **Wietse van der Verf**, Founder and CEO, Sea Ranger Service and 2020-2021 EYL40
4. **Samir Abdelkrim**, Author of Startup Lions, Founder and CEO, EMERGING Valley and 2020-2021 EYL40

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