



European Economic and Social Committee

# EESC info

European Economic and Social Committee

A bridge between Europe and organised civil Society

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SPECIAL ISSUE: YOUR EUROPE YOUR SAY

## Available Languages:

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### Editorial



Dear readers,

It is a pleasure for me to kick off this special issue of our newsletter dedicated to our annual event for young people, *Your Europe, Your Say!* (YEYS). I strongly believe in the idea that everyone has to be heard; this is why the voice of young Europeans is as important for us as anyone else's.

As 2018 is the European Year of Cultural Heritage, we asked the students to focus on this topic. We were presented with some inspiring ideas over the two-day event on how to embrace and share our diverse and unique European culture.

Two of the winning ideas drew attention to Europe's smaller cities, which are often left out of the continent's main events and cultural activities. I believe that it is essential for the EU institutions to follow students' advice and make sure that the European project includes and provides equal opportunities to every European regardless of where they come from. Only in this way can we hear truly diverse opinions shaped by different experiences and perspectives.

A number of proposals the students made to EU-policy makers included travelling and exchange opportunities as a tool for experiencing different cultures. Many emphasised the importance of being able to learn languages so that the communication barrier between different European nations is overcome at a young age. While listening to these widely expressed ideas, I could not help thinking how vital it is for Europe to continue and even expand programmes such as Erasmus or the European Solidarity Corps. Exchange programmes for young Europeans are not only a great opportunity to study abroad, learn foreign languages or travel, they also imprint important European values, which to a great extent are the essence of Europe's future.

It has been an honour for me to organise our annual *Your Europe, Your Say!* youth event three times. As this year marks my last year as EESC vice-president, I have to say that after meeting hundreds of creative and enthusiastic young Europeans, I am confident in the future of our Europe. Even though Europe is facing challenges and some discontent, there is an inspiring younger generation ready to build a better future together. It is important to hear their ideas and spread their words and hopes.

Gonçalo Lobo Xavier

EESC Vice-President for Communication

## In short

### Members' involvement

A special thank you goes to all the members who visited the schools for their commitment in preparing the students for their debate in Brussels: Martina Širhalová, Dimitar Manolov, Baiba Miltoviča, Piroska Kállay, Séamus Boland, Marie Zvolská, Ionuț Sibian, Roman Haken, Volker Petersen, Stéphane Buffetaut, Gintaras Morkis, Roman Haken, Cristian Pîrvulescu, Andreas Pavlikkas, Brendan Burns, Renate Heinisch, Alfred Gajdosik, Emilio Fatovic, Pirkko Raunemaa, Josiane Willems, Mário Soares, Martin Siecker, Arno Metzler, Andrés Barceló Delgado, Krzysztof Pater, Marina Škrabalo, Eve Päärendson, Ronny Lannoo, Evangelia Kekeleki, Sofia Björnsson, Primož Šporar, Stefano Mallia.



## The other ideas on European cultural heritage



YEYS students put forward and voted on 10 proposals. Here are the other seven, together with the number of votes they received:

- Equality through Culture (47)
- The Future of our Europe: Preservation and Development (42)
- "I give once, I take once!" BRIDGE (48)
- Cultural Awareness and Exposure (36)
- Safety through Acceptance (43)
- A Better Connection for the EU (44)
- ECE: European Cultural Exchange (46)

## EESC News

### Your Europe, Your Say 2018: Inspiring ideas for finding unity in diverse European culture



European young people say that greater opportunities for learning languages through travelling, more accessible European cultural sites and preserving our culture through national cuisine and crafts can inspire young Europeans to discover different cultures and gain a better understanding of our common cultural heritage. These recommendations to EU policymakers were suggested by 99 students from across Europe, who took part in the annual youth event Your Europe, Your Say (YEYS) 2018. Organised by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), the event took place in Brussels for the ninth year running.

#### **Winning ideas for European culture**

On 15-16 March the EESC welcomed students from 33 high schools in 28 EU member states and 5 candidate countries. As 2018 is the European Year of Cultural Heritage, YEYS also focused on culture and chose the theme *United in diversity: a younger future for European culture*.

The EESC vice-president, **Gonçalo Lobo Xavier**, emphasised the importance of listening to young people and taking their ideas into consideration. "This incredible project called Europe belongs to everybody, it is built by everybody and everybody has a voice. That is exactly why you are here", said Mr Lobo Xavier as he welcomed students to YEYS.

During intensive debates and workshops students discussed how to preserve European cultural heritage and make it more appealing to young Europeans. The ideas included important and highly debated topics in Europe such as equality, security and integration, which could be improved through cultural activities. Out of 10 tangible recommendations to EU policymakers, the three most appealing proposals were selected by vote:

1. **The opportunity of discovering other cultures through travelling.** This project suggests creating a special study exchange program with language classes, where students would live in host families and learn about new cultures. "If you go and see different cultures, you get to appreciate them a lot more, and you become proud to be European," explained a student from Cyprus, who presented this recommendation;
2. **Preserve culture, learn from the past and use it to build the future.** This recommendation aims to create the European Union House of Cuisine in every Member State. "When ordering a specific national dish, the service would include a small note explaining the historical circumstances in which the dish was originally created and would build higher tolerance between nations," a delegate from Slovenia said. Besides that, the group of students proposed creating a support program for small, traditional handmade craft stores in order to preserve our traditional folk culture;
3. **Experiment with culture.** This project aims to bring culture and cultural heritage closer to all people by creating traveling theme festivals and avoiding concentrations of museums in big cities. "It is an ideal we should try to achieve because it is a way we can become richer. It is much more interesting when you open up to other cultures. I am not sure, though, that European culture is tangible and accessible at the moment", said a delegate from France.

#### **Culture - the heart of Europe**

European teenagers had a chance to discuss the importance of preserving and fostering our cultural heritage with EESC members, experts and artists.

"We cannot build Europe if we do not give our culture and our cultural heritage a more central place. For too long Europe has been built mostly through economy, finance and market," said **Sneška Quaedvlieg-Mihailović**, secretary-general of Europa Nostra, an organisation which safeguards cultural and natural heritage in Europe. "These are extremely important tools for bringing economies and societies together. But what is the heart and soul of Europe? It is culture and cultural heritage," she added.

Ms Quaedvlieg-Mihailović also stressed that if Europe has a shared cultural heritage, its citizens have a shared responsibility to preserve it.

Meanwhile, the EESC president, **Georges Dassis**, stressed that many Europeans now have a privileged life, saying that this was not the case everywhere and was not always the case in Europe. "It is really important to encourage young people to take responsibility into their own hands to learn about what has been achieved, but also how to make it better. We have to work together and especially with young people, because without you nothing will happen," said Mr Dassis.

The EESC will ensure that the three proposals which received the most votes feed into the Committee's recommendations for EU law-makers. In addition, the Secretary-General of Europa Nostra, Ms Quaedy-Mihailović, expressed her interest in having these recommendations presented at the European Cultural Heritage Summit, which will take place this summer in Berlin.

Every year the EESC randomly selects and invites 33 schools – each representing a Member State or candidate country – to attend this unique annual youth initiative. As YEYS is becoming increasingly popular, the vice-president, Mr Lobo Xavier has suggested creating a network of past and present YEYS students and teachers.

To learn more about YEYS: <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/agenda/our-events/events/your-europe-your-say-2018>.

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## **Your Europe, Your Say - Fact and figures**



"Your Europe, Your Say!" is the EESC's annual youth event. Every year around 100 students from 33 secondary schools across Europe gather at the EESC to discuss the most important European issues and draw up resolutions addressed to the EU institutions.

Marking its 9th anniversary, this year's YEYS focused on the role of culture in the future of Europe - a hot issue as 2018 is the European Year of Cultural Heritage - as seen from the perspective of young Europeans, and on what they could do to improve it.

This year a total of 585 schools applied, 464 from EU countries and 121 from the five candidate countries (Albania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey). The 33 schools were selected by drawing lots, and they were visited by an EESC member who helped prepare students for the event.

On 15 and 16 March 2018, 99 students (three from each school) and 34 teachers met at the EESC. During the event, the students worked under the guidance of expert moderators in order to prepare 10 tangible recommendations to EU policymakers. The three most appealing proposals were then selected by vote.

The EESC, as the voice of civil society, is keen to ensure that the ideas of Europe's younger generation are heard. The three winning recommendations will be sent to the European Commission and the European Parliament and will also be presented by a delegation of students during the EESC's commemorative plenary for the 60th anniversary of the institution, which will take place on 24 May. More follow-up actions are planned together with the European Commission and Europa Nostra.

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## **In the students' own words**



EESC Info interviewed the students who came up with the winning proposals while they were still in the making. In these video interviews the students make the case for their ideas.

### **First winning proposal**

The first winning proposal came from a group of students who believed that travelling and learning languages could help us appreciate each other's cultures and make us all proud to be European. "Language definitely separates us, but it can also bind us and bring us all together", said Georgina from Cyprus, presenting her group's idea *The opportunity of discovering other cultures through travelling*. Click on the video to find out more about their project.

### **Second winning proposal**

The idea behind the European House of Cuisine was to celebrate and share European cultures to encourage tolerance among European nations. "This would include the support of migrants, who can contribute with their skills to our multicultural society. We want them to feel welcome and not ashamed", explained Zala. Check out the video interview to learn more about the proposal *Preserve culture, learn from the past and use it to build the future*

### **Third winning proposal**

Progress, accessibility and inclusivity were the key words for the last winning group, who combined experimentation and knowledge in support of European cultural heritage. "We believe it is time now to find an alternative to either closing in on ourselves, guarding our identity or losing it completely in a uniform kind of culture", explained Chanaé from France. Listen to her words to better understand what the project *Experiment with culture* aimed to achieve.

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