Editorial

"Inspired by Europe"

Dear Readers,

For two days from 21 to 22 March, the meeting rooms and hallways of the Jacques Delors building were filled with the laughter and smiles of 102 16-18 year olds from the 28 Member States and 5 candidate countries. These young people - shy at times, but mainly curious - were asking "What's the aim of this event?", "Can I answer questions that adults haven't been able to?" and "How can we make people want to vote in the European elections?".

And then they realised that their answers would be feeding into the debate on the future of Europe at a crucial time, just a few weeks before the European elections on 26 May. I spent several hours with them, and was very surprised at what I heard. "If we want to change the world, we need to start by asking ourselves what isn't working." And they have demands: they want, first of all, to be informed, and then to understand and believe in the project - to identify with it - in order, in the end, to engage with it, promote it and become its ambassadors.

But there is something else they need as well. It was a young man from Poland, Mateusz Tyszka, who suggested it, talking about passion and urging the other participants to "never give up on their dreams". We also need to join forces, and to dare to dream. And thus these young people take on a visionary role.

"Your Europe, Your Say" event gives them the opportunity to discover the participatory democracy that is so important to the EESC, and to learn about dialogue, listening and compromise.

"Your Europe, Your Say" has been running for 10 years now. It was Irini Pari, the vice-president for communication in 2009, who initially had the fantastic idea of bringing these young people to the EESC, and the Visits and Publications Unit then took up the baton. If we are to build Europe with our young people, we need to talk to them, let them talk, and listen to them. Each year, the event covers a different topic: culture, peace and diversity (2018); the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome (2017); migration (2016).

What conclusions did the young people reach in 2019? Of the ten recommendations proposed and voted on by the 100 young participants, a shortlist of four was selected (including two tied for third place); the ultimate winner was #Future is now: an EU syllabus on politics and voting to increase knowledge.

I am a teacher myself, and I am very aware of the role that school plays in young people's lives. And I fully support the idea of a mandatory syllabus for learning about Europe and 60 years of European integration.

One of the participants from the United Kingdom told us that, just after the Brexit referendum, people in her country had turned to Google to finally find out what the European Union actually was. As she said, it was a pity that it had taken the referendum for people to... discover Europe!

The project has expanded. Year after year, it has brought together young people to inspire them with a passion for Europe. They can not only become dedicated EU fans but, above all, set their own priorities for the EU and make this unique project a part of their future.

See you next year for the 2020 edition of "Your Europe, Your Say" and for a new adventure!

Isabel Caño
Vice-president for communication

In short

Members' involvement

Thank you

Your Europe Your Say, in the media

Austria - ORF.at: Students make EU policy
Croatia - Jutarnji list: ZAGREB YOUNGSTERS IN BRUSSELS: Lara, Nikola and Patrick addressed the topic of European elections and how to encourage young people to participate
Finland - HAAAPAVESI LEHTI: High school students represent Finland in Brussels
France - Ouest France: Saint-Brieuc: For these high school students from Saint-Charles, "we are the future of Europe"
Italy - Servizio Informazione Religiosa: Youth: Brussels, 102 students from across the EU to participate in the 2019 edition of "Your Europe Your Say!"

New publications

A digital history of YEYS

A digital history of Your Europe, Your Say!
The EESC’s youth flagship event *Your Europe, Your Say!* was first held on 15-17 April 2010. Now a digital publication is retracing ten years of YEYS commitment to involving young people across Europe in EU policy-making, highlighting the issues they addressed, the proposals that emerged from their debates and the subsequent outcomes, all with a view to demonstrating the value of young people’s contribution to shaping Europe.

The publication offers a wealth of multimedia content, particularly videos, and is intended both for the general public and specific stakeholders such as youth organisations, schools, teacher and parent associations, the media, etc. It also aims to encourage a sense of community among YEYS alumni and help keep their legacy alive.

Geared towards being read on mobile devices (tablets and smartphones), it will be available in all languages on the Committee’s internet site.

**EESC News**

**Young Europeans want education and social media to boost democracy and citizen participation in the EU**

A mandatory syllabus on European politics to increase citizens’ knowledge of the EU before they cast their ballots was the most voted proposal of this year’s YEYS. After 2 days of lively discussions and debates, the 99 high-school students aged 16-17 selected for YEYS 2019 presented 10 recommendations during a final plenary session. The 4 most voted proposals were:

1. **#Future is now**, a project for a mandatory syllabus for schools all across Europe with 3 strands: practical, with visits to EU institutions; theory, with tests and presentations; and an interactive platform with quizzes and videos.
2. **EU&U.EU**, a website summarizing information on the EU and EU elections to increase transparency and awareness with an intensive use of social media and multimedia contents.
3. **Europe E-VOTE**, a proposal to make election day a national holiday and to promote electronic voting.
4. **From You to EU**, an initiative to connect social movements with politicians and enable them to work together to find solutions.

The other proposals presented by the students were:
#Insta (nt) vote, improving EU social media accounts performance by including high quality content specifically addressed to young people, such as short videos and influencer comments as a way to increase awareness and participation.

Network of Young Europeans, a project aiming to inform on EU action and limits, connect diverse people across Europe and inspire debate through an Internet platform to organise projects and publish their outcomes.

Find(ing) your voice, a project involving a summit that would take place 3 times per year with face to face dialogue and activities involving young Europeans and politicians plus a website with interactive contents.

Shape your future - express yourself, consisting in a website that would allow posting opinions on several topics targeting young people from under 26. Users could like or dislike the opinions and the most popular.

ShareEU, an APP that could be used to connect social movements to EU institutions, with specialized moderators that would submit a monthly report to the European Parliament on the initiatives posted, thus creating a

Voices worth being heard, a platform where initiatives and speeches could be promoted to encourage voters to engage and fight for their own ideas. The audience would select the initiatives to be presented to the European Parliament.

Students were welcomed by Luca Jahier, EESC President, who said: “We have to follow the example of Greta Thunberg, who was capable of mobilising a great number of people in a short time using a direct language.

At ten YEYS is more relevant than ever, says initiator

With YEYS turning ten this year, EESC Info met former vice-president, Irini Pari, who first came up with the idea for this event in 2010, to take a look back at EESC Info: Ms Pari, could you tell us how this initiative came to life? What was the inspiration behind it?

Irini Pari: As vice-president for communication, I wanted to reach out to young Europeans. I wanted to give these "unusual suspects" the opportunity to live, understand and share their ideas.

Are you satisfied with the way YEYS has developed over time?

Yes! It is a blessing to see something you created develop and grow. It is a huge reward to know you have touched a thousand young hearts across Europe. I take this opportunity to thank the YEYS team for embracing this event with so much enthusiasm and passion and keeping up the good work over the years.

How do you see the role of young people in the construction of Europe now and in the future?

I believe firmly in young people and their dynamism. Young people today are growing up in difficult and challenging times, yet every challenge is also a magnificent opportunity.

How would you rate YEYS 2019?

Like every year I am impressed by the results! This year the teenagers from around Europe debated the subject Vote for the future. They asked for more education, more information and more transparency using all means available - interactive websites, face to face meetings - and involving everyone - senior citizens, youth, politicians, social movements, experts and media.

What would your ideal Europe be like?

I dream of a deeply democratic Europe where elections, division of powers, fundamental rights and the rule of law are respected. A Europe where there is a thriving, dynamic, independent and participatory democracy.

YEYS as seen by former participants: a transformative experience

The first edition of Your Europe, Your Say took place in 2010, a time when the devastating financial crisis had just started, all EU institutions had different presidents and Brexit was just a few years away. But today Young Europe is fighting for a better future. And this is why YEYS is more relevant than ever.
Carlos Aceituno, from Spain, was one of the participants in the first YEYS in 2010. That year, the eruption of a volcano in Iceland blocked air traffic in Europe, so several delegations could not make it to Brussels and tripped: “I wouldn’t say that attending YEYS determined my choices, because at that time I already knew that I wanted to become a teacher, but it definitely helped me to understand the link between education and political action.”

In 2012, only seven years ago, Evita Nedzvecka came from Latvia to take part in the third YEYS. Now she is the youngest diplomat in her country and works for the Latvian embassy in Oslo. A brilliant career that can also be linked to her YEYS experience:

Giovanni Arcari, from Italy, lived the YEYS experience in 2014 and shares most of the views of the two other former participants:

“Communicate with people from other countries and different backgrounds.”

The role of these “veterans” was to take part in the debates and make use of their experience to help this year’s participants to better define their proposals. The three of them pointed out the energy and enthusiasm of YEYS participants may be teenagers, but their view on EU affairs does not differ much from that of adults: they care as much as their parents do about the growth of populism, the risk that this lack of communication can lead to a rise in populism of various kinds and threaten democracy and EU values was also raised during the debates: “Those who fall asleep in a democracy might wake up in a dictatorship one day,” said one Austrian student, adding: All these concerns were reflected in the ten proposals the students drafted, which all included the need for clarity and transparency in EU communication policy. And, in the view

Communication is the challenge, social media are the answer

Your Europe, Your Say - Facts and figures
A record 1039 applications were received for this 10th YEYS - 972 from the EU countries and 67 from the five candidate countries - with the highest number coming from Romania (221) and the lowest from Malta and Montenegro (4 each).

33 secondary schools were selected to participate - one from each of the 28 EU Member States and five candidate countries (Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey) - using an electronic name picker. For the first time in YEYS’ history one of Brussels’ schools was represented.

On 20 and 21 March 2019, 102 students - three from each of the participating schools - came to Brussels to take part in the big debate. The youngest were 15 years old and the oldest 19. The students were divided into four groups of 25 students and 4 teachers per group. Ahead of the event, the participants prepared for the debate under the guidance of an accompanying teacher. They were also visited by an EESC member who helped stir the debate.

During the event, the students worked under the guidance of expert moderators in order to prepare 10 recommendations to present to EU policymakers. Then the three most appealing recommendations were selected.

Your Europe, Your Say? (YEYS) is organised by the EESC, the voice of civil society at European level, and is the Committee’s flagship event for youth. Through this initiative, the EESC aims to ensure that the views, experiences and ideas of the younger generation are taken on board in EU policy-making.

Further details about YEYS2019 are available on the event’s official page.