



European Economic and Social Committee



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT



5 ideas for a younger europe



Anna Maria Darmanin

Vice-President of the
European Economic
and Social Committee



Gianni Pittella

First Vice-President of the
European Parliament

5 Ideas: on the road

Between October 2011 and February 2013, Gianni Pittella and Anna Maria Darmanin held discussions with students in several universities across Europe.

FRANCE POLAND BELGIUM
MALTA CROATIA UNITED KINGDOM
AUSTRIA ITALY
SPAIN

Final Event at EESC on 18 March 2013



Opening the debate, **Anna Maria Darmanin** set out the purpose of the initiative. “Young people are facing different challenges from earlier generations and it is difficult for decision makers to understand what concerns young people most. So we decided to ask them! We went on a listening exercise, to hear what they have to say, what they find important, and what Europe can do for them. It has been a very exciting project and we were both impressed by the enthusiasm, the belief and the readiness to act that we encountered among our young hosts everywhere.”



Gianni Pittella highlighted the demands of the young people they met for a more political EU. “Time and again, from north and south, east and west, they told us that they don’t like the hybrid Europe of today. Nor do they accept a Europe based on austerity, endangered by banks and run by technocrats – they want an EU with elected representatives in charge and truly European political parties.”

The five ideas are a distillation of the dreams and aspirations encountered across Europe. Concrete proposals on democracy, employment, rights, education, and the European public sphere.



Democracy

The creation of a true European political union with among other things a directly elected EU president

Young people tell us that they feel distant from Brussels, explained Anna Maria Darmanin, yet they are interested in Europe and want to be at its heart. A more unified Europe with a directly elected president is their suggestion to bring Brussels closer to young people and boost their sense of involvement.

In the discussion that followed, speakers from the audience agreed, but pointed out that a president with no powers is of little use – so a European constitution is needed first to establish such powers. Others warned that the large/small country balance in voting representation must be agreed upon, and this would be difficult. Overall, it was felt that, while the middle of a crisis might not be the best time for setting up treaties, a directly elected president and a constitution based on shared values, such as solidarity, co-operation and human rights, are highly desirable.



Employment

Establish a European public employment service to match young job-seekers to jobs and guide their education and training choices to match labour market needs

"We found a hard reaction from young people to the current austerity policies that are reducing job and training opportunities in many Member

States,” reported Gianni Pittella. “They tell us they want more opportunities for work and study, not less,” he explained. They are also angered by the funding problems encountered by the Erasmus programme, and in fact would like it to be expanded to cover, for example, artists and athletes.”

“Young people prize the mobility the EU offers – believing it enriches them. The pan-European employment service that came from our discussions is a way to boost such mobility,” said Pittella. Speakers from the audience found such a service attractive and a means of boosting mobility, but they pointed out more pressing issues for young people – such as unpaid traineeships that can delay careers and the means to start families and can be divisive, as only those with other sources of support can take them on. Companies can afford to pay, said one speaker, and unpaid traineeships are an example of intergenerational unfairness. All were united on the need for growth, and growth-enhancing policies as the means to boost employment. Tax breaks for young workers are one way to support this. The proposed employment service was praised as essential by another speaker, in particular as it could help guide job-seekers to productive economic sectors and sustainable jobs.



Rights

Harmonisation of human, social, civil, political and economic rights across the EU as a means of avoiding ‘rights’ becoming ‘privileges’ for some

“We found a widespread recognition of European core values among young people,” said Anna Maria Darmanin, “but at the same time this highlighted

disparities among the Member States – for example, on immigrants’ rights or the recognition of gay marriages.” In the discussions with young people, the proposal was formulated for setting common standards for a series of rights that embody European values on human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, and the rule of law.

Speakers from the audience stressed that a careful approach is needed. “Societal changes must take the people with them,” insisted one. “Getting acceptance for gay marriage is different from legislating for it,” argued another – “changing laws is not the same as changing minds, that’s a long-term process”. One speaker suggested that encouraging tolerance might be a better approach than legislating, while others thought that harmonisation could do a service by exposing sensitive issues to change. A common opinion in the audience was that the law will not trump culture, and that the EU should tread carefully when touching issues that concern people’s beliefs, although this is not a reason to do nothing.

Education

Set up a four-year European degree programme to be completed at four universities in four countries. Further develop distance and virtual universities and establish ‘EU ambassadors’ in university faculties to inform students on EU opportunities

“A true single market for qualifications was the message we received,” explained Gianni Pittella. To support this, young people proposed common standards for qualifications and teaching, and the European degree programme is one way of achieving this. Other proposals covered better links between education and business, work experience as part of university studies, and including EU issues in school and university education.

However, the audience in Brussels was not convinced. “A year abroad, such as with Erasmus, is fine,” said one speaker, “but four years is too much and would be too expensive, if it is not properly funded.” Others supported this view, explaining that a stable environment is important in education, that the need to fund four years abroad risks supporting privilege, and that few students or teachers have the language skills to do this. A solution might be to make the

teachers mobile rather than students, proposed one speaker. However, there was much praise for the one-year Erasmus study programme – described as the ‘mother of best practice’ and an experience which builds the feeling of being European. On EU ambassadors in faculties, the audience thought it a fine idea but that it could only be effective if the position could also be remunerated.

European Public Sphere

Europeans report that television is their leading source of information, therefore a European public broadcasting company should be established to provide transnational spaces for cross-border entertainment and debate that enhances the feeling of EU citizenship

“This proposal came up time and time again in our discussions across Europe,” said Anna Maria Darmanin, “We are not getting effective communications from the EU, they told us.” A European broadcasting company would provide a dynamic, public space to exchange information on Europe and help build a European identity. However, as one speaker pointed out, there are already pan-European channels – the problem is to attract people to watch them. Another speaker claimed that information on Europe is already there, and what is needed is to show people how to find it. Local champions for the EU, to support communications better, were also proposed. And there were doubts about how a large audience could be attracted given the language permutations. Overall, the audience felt that unemployment and education are higher priorities.



The Next Steps

Anna Maria Darmanin

"Politicians are listening, this is the citizens' time."

Gianni Pittella

"We found an impressive demand for a political union from young people."



Gianni Pittella and Anna Maria Darmanin set out the commitments for the follow up of the 5 ideas for a younger Europe project.

Anna Maria Darmanin will draft an own-initiative opinion, based on the 5 ideas discussions with young Europeans, to be adopted by the European Economic and Social Committee.

Gianni Pittella will try to bring a resolution before the European Parliament supporting young European's proposals.

The two vice-presidents will together present the 5 ideas in a letter to the Presidents of the European Parliament and the European Economic and Social Committee urging the two institutions to take them into account in their future work.

To ensure that the outcomes of all the valuable discussions held with young people from across Europe are not lost, Gianni Pittella and Anna Maria Darmanin will also co-author a book which will include the 5 ideas for a younger Europe experience.

The EESC is on-line:

www.eesc.europa.eu

The EESC on Social Media:



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European Economic and Social Committee

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