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**WORKING DOCUMENT FOR THE PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS**

**EU@60: where to next?**

**Introduction**

2017 is a very important year for Europe, as it marks the 60th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Rome establishing the European Economic Community, the forerunner of the European Union.

Back in 1957, the EU’s founders recognised that European unity, freedom and solidarity involved not only nations and governments, but also people. They set up the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) at the outset, alongside the other EU institutions, to enable "organised civil society[[1]](#footnote-2)" to advise decision-makers on a vast range of issues, the EESC being the voice of the economic and social forces of society.

Young people are Europe’s future, and they will decide the direction of the EU in the years to come. So the EESC has always placed a particular emphasis on involving young people in its policy debates. In 2017, **the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome** will be the theme of the Committee’s annual Your Europe, Your Say youth event, offering young people from around Europe the opportunity to share their ideas about the EU of yesterday, today and tomorrow.

**Your Europe, Your Say!**

The EESC launched Your Europe, Your Say in 2010, as an annual event bringing school students – and their teachers – from every Member State together in the heart of the EU. The youngsters debate proposals on a specific theme and agree on a resolution to be put to EU decision-makers.

One school is selected at random from each country, and sends three pupils aged 16 or more and their teacher to Brussels, to take part in their own simulated EESC plenary session, discussing a topical subject.

YEYS 2017 will take place on 30 and 31 March 2017. In the run-up to the event, EESC members visit the chosen schools to talk about the Committee’s work and answer pupils’ questions.

YEYS is a unique opportunity for young people to meet and share experiences, listen to their counterparts from different countries and learn more about the way others live. In Brussels, students will debate and vote on the political challenges facing the EU at this difficult time, and suggest their own solutions.

Your Europe, Your Say fosters friendship, tolerance and understanding. It also provides an enriching and unforgettable experience not only for the young people taking part, but also for us in the EESC.

**About the Treaty of Rome**

The 1957 Treaty of Rome articulated a visionary project to promote unity and peace across a continent ravaged by 20th-century wars. Six countries signed the Treaty: Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and West Germany. It also launched the idea of a single market, bringing down barriers and frontiers and enabling countries to exchange goods, services, labour and capital – often referred to as the EU’s Four Freedoms.

With these freedoms came the recognition that workers should also have equal rights, and that economic union should lead to social progress and higher living standards for European citizens. The European Social Model based on social protection and dialogue was further developed by Commission President Jacques Delors in the 1980s.

Since the Treaty of Rome, successive enlargements have increased the number of Member States to 28 – shortly to become 27 with the withdrawal of the UK.

**The European Economic and Social Committee**

The EESC is currently made up of 350 members from civil society organisations in 28 Member States. They are arranged in three groups, representing employers, workers and "various interests" (from environmentalists and farmers to consumers, NGOs and many more). The EESC members – men and women, young and old – embody a huge amount of knowledge and experience.

The Committee’s mission is to make the voice of organised civil society heard. The European Parliament, Council and Commission are legally obliged to consult the EESC when passing many new laws. The EESC draws up opinions on these and other issues, which are agreed by consensus between the three groups. This makes the Committee unique, in that it reflects the interests of the whole of organised civil society (employers, workers, various interests), based on compromise and mutual respect.

**The European Union in 2016**

Over the last 60 years, the EU has brought countless benefits for its citizens. These include free movement, a single currency, high environmental standards, funding and support for disadvantaged individuals and regions, research and innovation, student exchange programmes like Erasmus, and the Youth Guarantee that has helped 9 million young people to find work, training or an apprenticeship.

But recently the EU project has run into crisis. Unemployment and weak economic recovery, the refugee crisis, terrorist attacks and rising nationalism have all played a part. The EU is built on the support and consent of its citizens, but with recent opinion polls showing that fewer than four in ten Europeans believe their voices count at EU level, restoring confidence is a top priority. On the other hand, a majority of European Citizens still support their country being a member of the European Union.

**"More than anything, we need to invest in our young people,"** acknowledged European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker in his State of the Union address in September 2016. "There are many young, socially-minded people in Europe willing to make a meaningful contribution to society and help show solidarity." The Bratislava roadmap drawn up by EU leaders during the Slovak EU Presidency, aims to "*create a promising economic future for all, safeguard our way of life and provide better opportunities for youth*".

And young people care. In the recent UK referendum on 23 June 2016, for example, twice as many young voters turned out as expected, and 75% of 18 to 24-year-olds wanted to remain in the EU. Despite the problems, more nations are waiting to join the EU, and young people in the Balkans, for example, yearn impatiently for the opportunities it offers.

**Tough questions to consider**

To help students and their teachers to formulate ideas and prepare for the debate in Brussels, below are some of the questions that could arise during YEYS 2017:

**The future of Europe**

* How would you evaluate the EU's main achievements so far?
* How do you visualise the Europe of tomorrow? Are you optimistic or pessimistic?
* What do young people want from the EU in the future?
* How can young people increase their influence on EU decision-making?
* Do you discuss European issues with family and/or friends and at school?
* What are the biggest challenges facing the EU and what are the opportunities for building a strong European Union?
1. Economic recovery
2. Youth employment
3. Refugees/migration
4. The rise of nationalism
5. Security/peace
6. Energy supply
7. A sustainable future (Combating Climate Change)
8. Enough good quality food at affordable prices
9. Digitalisation
10. The demographic problem
11. Other
* According to recent surveys, the index of optimism about the future of the EU has fallen to its lowest level; what is the main reason for this in your opinion?

**EU priorities**

* How do you rate these EU "benefits":
1. Peace
2. The right to work abroad
3. The right to study abroad
4. Easier holiday travel
5. The euro
6. An end to mobile roaming charges
7. Consumer protection when you buy goods online
8. Environmental standards
9. Cross-border cooperation on research and innovation
10. Common policies to fight climate change
11. Action against inequality and discrimination
12. Workers’ rights, health and safety
* Can you think of examples of decisions made in Brussels that have improved your life (or made it more difficult)?
* Are you in favour of more European integration or should the EU be simply a trading bloc?
* Are you in favour of an EU army?

**Challenges**

* How could the EU have handled the refugee crisis better?
* In your view, what will be the consequences of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union? Will it affect young people in other EU countries?
* What should be done to halt the rise of nationalism and xenophobia?
* What can the EU do to defend Europeans against terrorist attacks?
* Does globalisation make the EU more or less significant?
* Is power too centralised in the EU? Should more decisions be devolved to national or local level?
* How can EU leaders relate better to citizens?
* How can national leaders relate better to Europe?
* What single change of policy or decision would benefit people in the EU most?

**Communication**

* Do you feel you have enough information about:
1. EU history
2. EU structures
3. EU policies
* Do you think the media give accurate information about the EU? How can communication be improved? Do you get enough information in school?
* What can the European institutions do to communicate better with young people?
* What can YOU do to help build Europe?

**Further information**

Your Europe, Your Say!

<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.events-and-activities-your-europe-your-say-2016>

About the EESC

<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.the-committee>

State of the Union 2016

<http://www.soteu.eu/>

Public Opinion in the EU <http://ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/PublicOpinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/STANDARD/surveyKy/2130>

1. "Organised civil society" comprises all the groups and organisations in which people work cooperatively – whether at local, national or European level. These groups often act as intermediaries between decision-makers and citizens, and enable people to get actively involved in improving their living conditions. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)