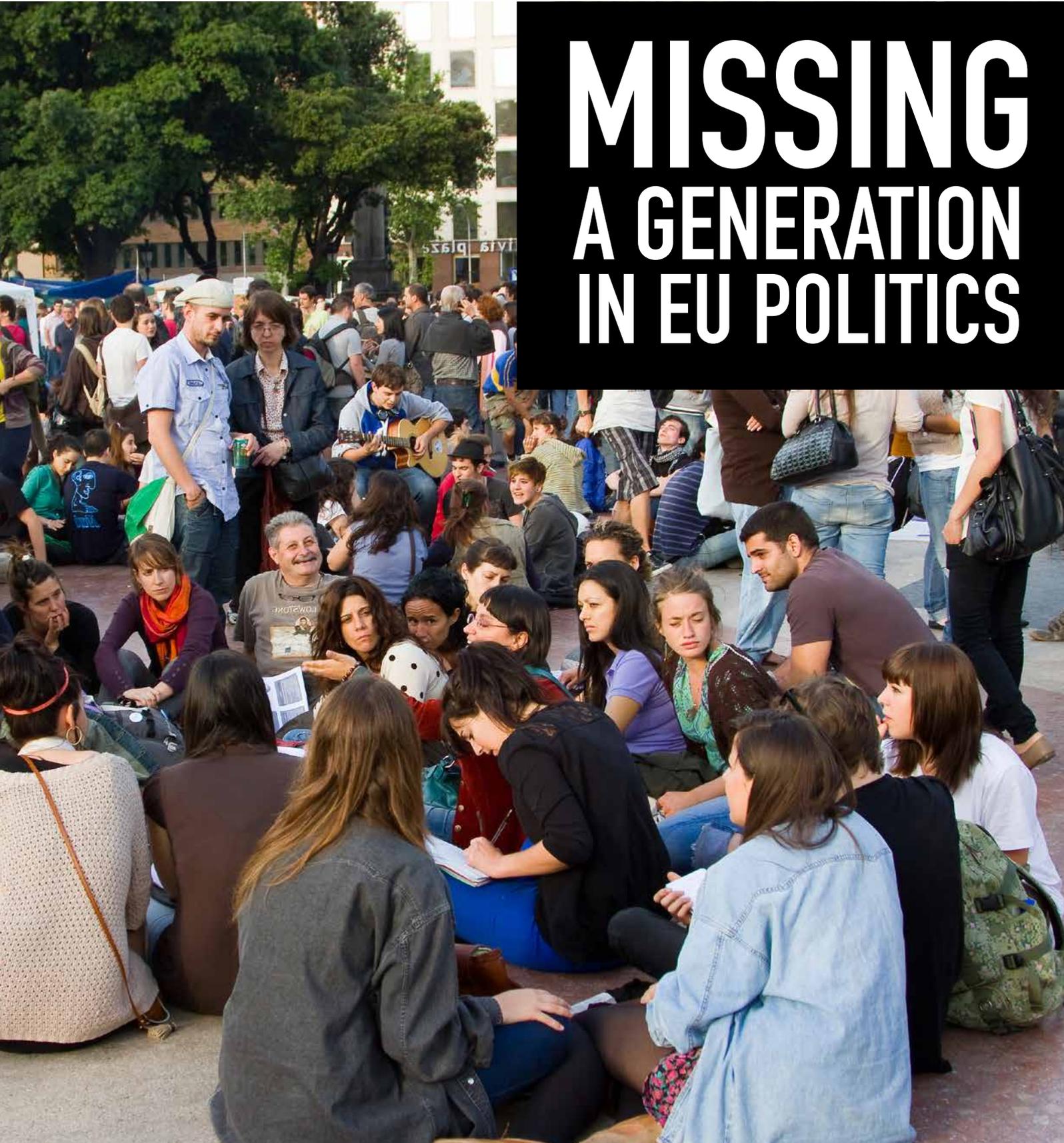


# MISSING A GENERATION IN EU POLITICS



**How to involve young Europeans?**

Young Europeans comment on political participation ahead of the elections

FutureLab Europe, April 2014

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# FOREWORD

## Young voices in the European project

Only five years ago I was a young candidate eager for an opportunity to influence the future of Europe. A few months later, on the 8th of June 2009, I woke up and realised that what had just happened the previous night would significantly change my life: I was one of thirteen freshly elected members of the European Parliament (EP) from Finland.

When the Parliament gathered for its first deliberations in July, I noticed that I was one of the youngest members to have received a mandate to represent the people, in the only democratically elected body at the European level. At the same time I was pleased to learn that there were some other young colleagues, and that a network existed in which young parliamentarians could exchange ideas and experiences.

I was young, new, from a small member state and a small party. To what extent would this affect my chances of getting the assignments I was interested in? The most important factor determining the substance of representatives' work and everyday routines; is which committee memberships and other duties they are assigned to. The negotiations for these assignments are held immediately at the beginning of the term but luckily, for me they went better than expected. I was assigned to the committees of budgets, and of economic and monetary affairs, as well as named vice-chairman of the committee on fisheries.

Once my parliamentary work had started in earnest in the autumn of 2009, the question of how this new and young parliamentarian would manage tough negotiations with experienced legislators from influential parties in large member states, once again presented itself. But already after a few years, I was given the honour of being the responsible negotiator for the liberal parliamentary group on new legislation about the common currency. In addition, I was made responsible for part of the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy, became the coordinator for the liberal group in the Committee on Budgets, chairman of the

parliamentary intergroup on minorities and vice-chairman of the intergroup for issues related to the Baltic Sea.

With hindsight, I can conclude that the European Parliament is a work environment where expertise, activity, compelling arguments, and hard work make the difference. The European Parliament is a healthy work environment, and young decision makers are taken seriously and measured by the same criterion as others.

Again now, many important decisions affecting the people of Europe, both young and old, will be taken in the coming years. Europe has lived through a deep crisis, a crisis that started out as a financial one but in the end will determine the future of the EU. This is why we need to do our utmost to ensure especially young citizens' involvement and commitment to the most successful peace project in the world's history.

In this publication, FutureLab Europe participants have underscored the need for fresh ideas and innovative concepts from younger generations. To achieve this, the 2014 elections are of the utmost importance. Hopefully, the voices of young people from all corners of Europe will be heard louder than ever in the assembly that we elect on the 25th of May.

Carl Haglund

Carl Haglund is Minister of Defence in Finland and a former Member of the European Parliament

# INTRODUCTION

The European Union has always struggled to build a strong relation with its electorate and the results of the 2009 European elections showed that turnout is still declining but also significantly lower than in national elections. The percentage of young people that voted in these elections was even lower, with an average of 29% for the age group 18-24 and 36% for the age group 25-36. This indicates that a whole generation is currently under-represented European politics. The inclusion of young Europeans in the election process is not only a short-term issue. Looking at the development of voting behaviour, research has shown that voting in one or more of the first three elections after reaching the voting age is critical for that person's future participation. This means that the years between the ages of 18-29 are crucial to ensure that citizens exert their democratic right to vote even as they grow older.

Direct participation of young Europeans in the EU also appears to be very low. At the moment of writing, only 2 people under the age of 30 and only 55 people between the age of 30 to 39 are members of the European Parliament with a total of 766 seats. This is disproportionate to the share of these age groups in the population as a whole. Although it should be acknowledged that this ratio may be similar in national parliaments, and some under-representation of young people is unavoidable due to the need for some form of track record and experience, the magnitude of the gap in these numbers does indicate that young people are not sufficiently represented.

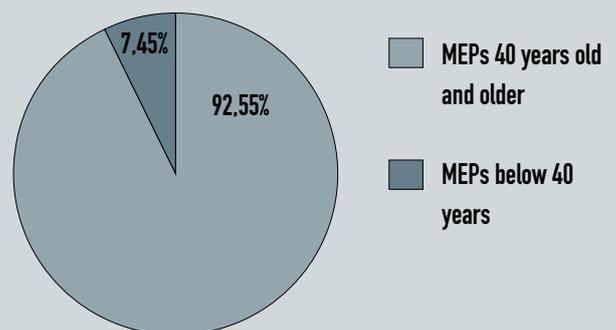
So what's at stake? This publication starts from the idea that such a narrow representation of young people in the EU, through direct and indirect participation, spells trouble. Simply put: When certain (age) groups in society are structurally excluded from political participation or do not exercise their rights as (European) citizens, the legitimacy of the democratic system is undermined. Without such legitimacy, young people in Europe cannot be expected to trust the EU to serve their needs. One could even argue that policies are far less likely to succeed if the voices of those influenced most by such policies, are insufficiently taken into account in EU decision making processes.

Young people in Europe grow up as European citizens, with the opportunity to live and work everywhere throughout the EU, so theoretically they could benefit most from European integration. At the same time, they also suffer the most from the impact of and measures following the financial and economic crisis. This clear stake young people have in the future of Europe, should translate itself into the engagement of these young Europeans in the decision-making process. This publication seeks to analyse and discuss why young people are currently not engaging in EU politics.

To investigate this further, FutureLab Europe carried out an online survey, asking young Europeans about their attitude towards the EU and the upcoming EP elections. This survey forms the basis of this publication and its results show root causes for low turnout among young people: Insufficient politicisation of the elections, the (perceived) lack of high-level discussions on subjects that are of interest to young people, few young Europeans representing young people in elected office, and a serious information deficit.

These causes will be discussed more in depth, together with suggestions that can help improving the situation. Instead of merely naming and shaming, FutureLab Europe participants have thus attempted to provide an answer to the question of how to involve young Europeans. Throughout the publication, FutureLab Europe participants also share their personal views and ideas on European integration as well as political participation of young Europeans.

**Number of young Members in the European Parliament (2014)**



# FUTURELAB EUROPE SURVEY



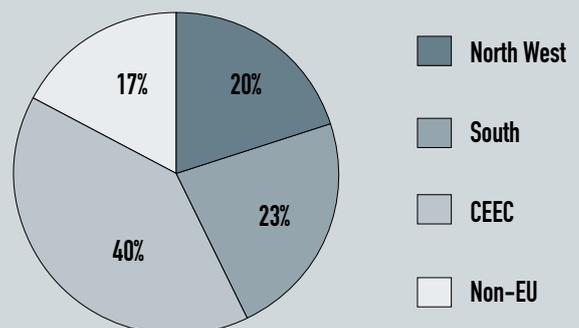
In an online survey carried out in January 2014, FutureLab Europe collected data from young Europeans aged 16 to 31, with the objective to understand how well young Europeans are informed about the EU and the elections. The respondents were asked if they plan to vote, which policy issues they consider most important, how they feel about the EU and what encourages or would encourage them to vote. To collect the answers, the survey was posted on FutureLab Europe's website and spread via social media and email-lists. It consisted of multiple-choice questions as well as open questions, and was made available in Albanian, Bulgarian, English, French, German, Greek, Italian, Serbian, Slovak and Spanish. The English version is attached in Appendix B.

While more detailed background information on the respondents -such as age and country of citizenship- is presented in Appendix A, some things are particularly noteworthy. First, a total of 1119 young people from 30 different countries, both EU countries and non-EU European countries, participated in the survey. Of these respondents, the largest age group was between 21-25 (44%). Over a quarter of them currently lives in another member state while more than double that (54%) indicated to have worked or studied abroad at some point in time. To facilitate processing of the collected data the countries of their citizenship were divided into four regions: North-West (20.3%), South (23.2%), New Member States (39.7%) and Non-Member States (16.8%).

**“THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT  
SHOULD STAND FOR GREATER  
RIGHTS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE  
IN DECISION-MAKING  
PROCESSES AND THE  
ADOPTION OF NEW POLICIES.”**

*from responses to the survey*

**FutureLab Europe survey, number of respondents from different regions in Europe**





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# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

In the last European elections in 2009 only a few young Europeans voted, which amounted for slightly more than 30%. Furthermore, only 7.45 % of all members of European Parliament are aged below 40. This implies a lack of involvement and representation of the young generations in the heart of EU's democratic arena. This lack of representation occurs at a time when the stakes have never been higher for young Europeans, with extremely high rates of youth unemployment, pressure on government services such as education, and declining welfare systems. To address the divide, FutureLab Europe participants have chosen to focus their input at the European level this year on representation of young people in the EU.<sup>2</sup>

In order to better understand their existing perception of the political process in the EU, FutureLab Europe submitted a survey to young Europeans in the first months of 2014. One of the main results from that survey

was that young people feel poorly informed about the functioning of the institutions and the upcoming European elections, including relevant election programmes and candidates in their constituencies. It also showed that their general understanding of the EU political structure and decision-making processes is very limited. Some of them even indicate that they do not feel competent to vote as a result of that knowledge gap. This lack of information -regardless of its causes- can be seen as an immediate driver of a democratic deficit in the EU.

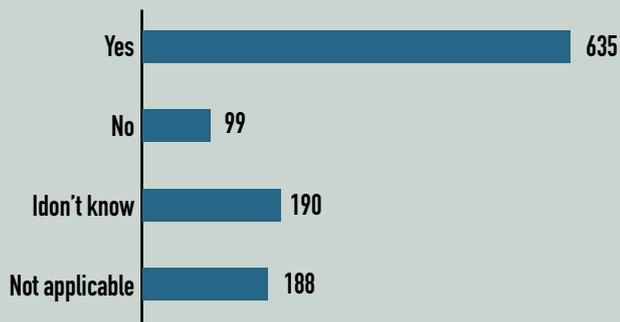
Based in part on an analysis of voter turnout percentages and the results of the survey, this publication identifies and explores in depth three causes of the democratic deficit for young Europeans. First, there is a political dimension where skepticism about the balance of power among the European institutions and a lack of politicisation of the debate, lead to a loss of interest in EU elections. Second, there is a strong perception that young people and

their interests are under-represented at the EU level. Finally, as mentioned above, there seems to be a huge knowledge gap regarding the EU institutions, elections and politics that further keeps young people away from the ballot-box.

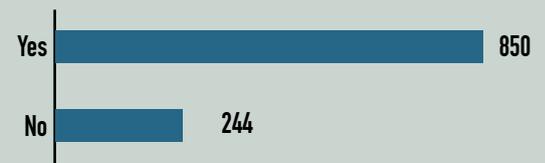
On a positive note however, a great majority of the respondent to the survey are more supportive of the EU than of domestic political systems, and are hopeful that the EU can contribute to their lives in many different ways. A whopping 60% of the respondents indicate that they plan to vote in the upcoming EU elections, even while they see there is still much to improve. Based on the criticism and suggestions from these respondents, as well as their own experience and analysis, FutureLab Europe participants propose a number of concrete recommendations to ensure that all these willing young Europeans will actually cast their vote in May 2014, as well as in the elections after that.

<sup>2</sup> Page 26 of this publication provides an introduction of the FutureLab Europe programme

### Are you planning to vote in the European Parliament elections 2014?



### Do you know that there will be European Parliament elections in May 2014?



## WIDEN THE POLITICAL DIMENSION TOWARDS EUROPE

On an abstract level, the lack of political participation among younger voters could be remedied by further politicising the elections. This could be achieved by:

- Organising truly pan-European elections, in which European citizens can elect from European parties' candidates, based on European election programmes.
- Creating a direct relation between the election and composition of the European Commission, including electing the President of the Commission directly or indirectly.
- Conducting the political debate on actual European issues, in particular those relevant for young Europeans, instead of focusing on national and local interests only.

## STRENGTHEN THE REPRESENTATION OF YOUNG EUROPEANS

Young people are concerned that they are under-represented at the EU level, both in the topics that are being decided and the presence of peers at the highest EU level. FutureLab Europe recommends:

- In the decision-making processes, the European institutions, and the European Parliament in particular -being the democratic heart of the EU- should pay more attention to the subjects that are of greatest concern to young Europeans: Employment, education, environment, citizen's participation and mobility.
- Where the EU currently has programmes that address problems of younger generations, the existence and success of these programmes should be better communicated to the group they are designed to help: young Europeans.

- Political parties (national as well as in the EP) should step up and reach out to young generations to learn more about their views and positions in innovative ways and on those platforms that younger generations are active on.
- These political parties should also put in place programmes to find, educate and guide new generations of potential politicians to increase the number of young people in office.

## IMPROVE INFORMATION ON ELECTIONS

Institutional opaqueness of the EU voting system is off-putting for many young Europeans and many of them feel adequately informed of the political realities in EU. Therefore:

- Election campaigns on the national and the European level should clearly outline plans on education, employment, environment, mobility and citizen's participation. The EU as a whole should focus their communications specifically on these priority issues.
- Clearer information on the elections should be made available, in particular on the candidates and the election programmes: who plans to focus on what when finally elected?
- Since younger generations are moving away from the conventional democratic systems, the European Parliament should innovate and find new ways to include young people in current debates.
- In general, the EU should make better use of online and social media tools to liaise with the young electorate and target younger voters in a language they can understand.
- Younger people throughout Europe should be educated more on the historical development and decision-making processes of the European institutions, as well as on the way the EU currently works.
- Mass media should report on the political choices being made in the EU -positive as well as negative-, instead of focusing on the national interest or the abstract question of pro/contra Europe.



# THE POLITICAL DIMENSION

The European Parliament (hereafter: EP) is the democratic flagship of EU and its elections form a vital element in the legitimacy of the EU's democratic system. It is through this institution that EU citizens can make their voice heard, by voting for the candidates they expect will be best suited to represent their interests. As we have seen in the previous chapters, youth participation is largely absent in this process, this chapter will discuss two main concerns that influence young voters' perception of the EP and the other EU institutions: balance of power between the institutions, and politicisation of the European elections.

## BALANCE OF POWER

The last institutional upgrade was introduced by the Lisbon Treaty, thereby significantly strengthening the power of the EP in its role as co-legislator. This positive development could and should serve as an encouragement to vote in the European elections as it increases the value of that vote. Voters need to see the importance of their choice, both in the quality of the representatives they choose and in terms of the possible influence those representatives can exercise in concrete legislative procedures. Unfortunately, thus far voter turnout has only decreased despite the increased role of the EP since the 1990s.

The EP elections in May 2014 will be the first elections held after the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty so it remains to be seen whether the increase in influence of the EP will translate in higher voter participation this time. At the same time, several respondents to the FutureLab Europe survey did indicate that strengthening the role of the EP was important to them. A clearer democratic control through the EP may therefore help to increase the credibility of the EU for young voters, even if it doesn't immediately translate into higher turnout at the polls. The question still remains: has the Lisbon Treaty gone far enough, or do young Europeans feel that more measures are required?

There is one aspect where FutureLab Europe participants see a concrete opportunity for improvement: As of yet, the EP can vote on the Commission as a whole but not on its president. When citizens would have a direct say in the appointment of the European Commission and its president in particular, either directly or through the EP, this could help politicise the European elections. If the election results would be directly linked to the make-up of the Commission, it would make voting more attractive. To achieve this, the European Commission has recommended European parties to nominate candidates for the Commission president before the elections. Such a campaign, claims the Commission, would better inform voters about the issues

at stake in the elections, and encourage a European debate whilst improving voter turnout.

Will this initiative be enough or should the composition of the European Commission, and especially the Commission presidency, directly depend on the outcome of the election? What if citizens could vote for a Commission president themselves? In the FutureLab Europe survey, 18% of all respondents said they would be more interested to vote if the EP could decide who will become Commission president and who will be the other Commissioners. This number is even higher when they themselves would be able to choose the Commission president. Linking the elections to the composition of the European Commission may thus have a positive effect on the turnout amongst young Europeans.

**“SOME RESPONDENTS STATED THAT IN HIS/HER VIEW THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT HAS NO INFLUENCE AT ALL, CITING THAT AS THE MAIN REASON NOT TO VOTE IN EUROPEAN ELECTIONS.”**

*comment by the authors*



## TRULY EUROPEAN ELECTIONS

Visibility and powers of the EP could play a key role in interesting young people to vote in European elections. But besides strengthening the link between the elections and the composition of the European Commission, what other opportunities are there to further politicise the elections? The survey clearly indicates that more politicised elections would attract young voters. In fact abstract, technocratic debates interest very few people outside of the Brussels bubble, let alone younger voters. Such discussions are valuable and important but have little meaning for those not working in or around the institutions. What does carry meaning are political questions that influence citizens' lives. This is why the elections should be politicised: they should be about political choices that people can relate to. According to survey results, many young people feel the elections could be more politicised, for example along the lines of 'left'/'right' political spectrum.

The absence of a pan-European debate and a common political system is often stated as a reason for lacklustre voter participation. Creating a pan-European political system, where citizens can choose on an EU platform those candidates that appeal most to their own

**“ELECTIONS SHOULD BE POLITICISED: THEY SHOULD BE ABOUT POLITICAL CHOICES THAT PEOPLE CAN RELATE TO.”**

*from responses to the survey*

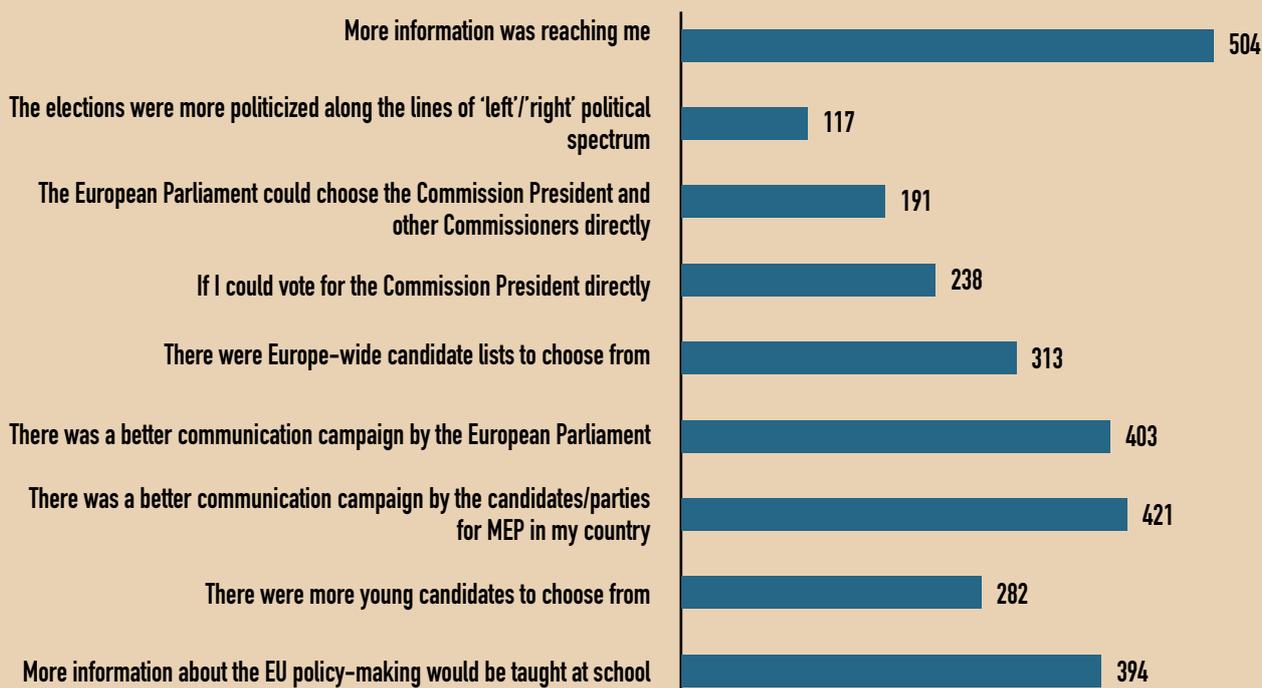
needs and ideas, might therefore help creating a more political dynamic in the EP elections. It would make the elections more about Europe than about national politics, more about actual European politics than an abstract notion of 'Brussels' or the 'EU'.

As it stands, there are 28 different elections in 28 different political systems. The variety in these systems not only prevents a pan-

European debate, it also affects the functioning of local political processes in different ways, including the elections. This creates inequality in the opportunities for a European citizen to make him/herself heard and it also creates 28 different political debates. Could then a system with pan-European candidate lists incite an overarching European debate and raise the interest to vote among young people? In answering question 10 of the FutureLab Europe survey, 29% of respondents said they would be more inclined to vote and participate if there were pan-European candidate lists.

Strengthening the role of the EP, fostering pan-European debate and implementing a European political system, would politicise the European elections. This in turn would have a positive effect on the interest to vote, especially among young voters. According to the FutureLab Europe survey results, the introduction of European candidate lists would have an even bigger impact than linking the European elections to the composition of the European Commission. Such a pan-European candidate list would, if done properly and after careful analysis of the consequences, make the election more about Europe, less about national politics and add to the political dimension of the EU.

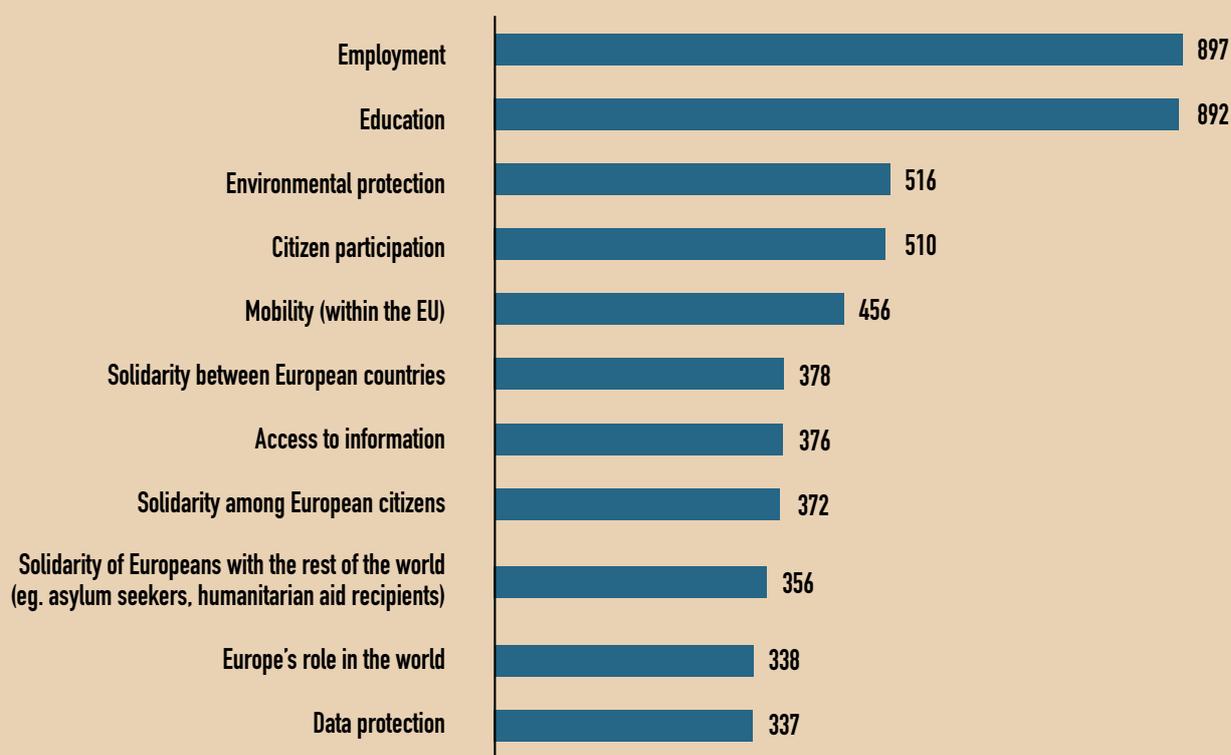
### I would be more interested to vote in the European elections if:





# REPRESENTATION AT THE EU LEVEL

## Which of the following policy issues do you consider of key relevance?



Another fundamental question in relation to the involvement of young people in European politics is whether they are actually sufficiently represented at the EU level. Recently, some youth organisations have criticised the EU for ignoring the interests of young people. The FutureLab Europe survey revisited the issue and started by asking young Europeans what policy issues they found most important in an EU context, and if they feel that the subjects they care about are discussed by decision-makers in Brussels.

Not surprisingly, employment and education were seen as most relevant topics. In countries where youth was hit hardest by the crisis and youth unemployment rates have skyrocketed, such as Greece and Spain, employment and education were mentioned even more frequently. Employment and education were followed by environmental protection, citizen's participation and mobility.

Although varying somewhat from one member state to the next, these results imply that election campaigns should focus primarily on education and employment to draw young people to the ballot-box. Focusing the debate on these concrete issues is clearly a way to politicize the elections and increase young voter's participation.

Having identified these key issues can also serve to close the gap between the EU and young Europeans in periods between election times. The EU as such should also clearly

communicate its competence and working plans on these issues to young voters. At the moment, young Europeans can only wonder what the EU has done to solve young people's predicament and economic malaise.

It is worth mentioning that the EU has in fact put in place several programmes, such as the new Erasmus + initiative, which seeks to provide a solution to high unemployment rates, and gaps in education and knowledge. In addition, the EU has implemented the Youth Guarantee Program that should ensure a job, apprenticeship, traineeship or continued education, for people under 25. Considering that by focusing on such programmes, the EU has in fact made education and employment a priority in the last years, the question remains why young people still feel that their interests are badly represented. Are these programs badly implemented on Member State level, do they appear to be non-effective, or is there a communication gap? The next chapter will further discuss what information on the EU and its policies actually reach young people, and where there may be a gap between young Europeans' perception and reality.

***"They should encourage citizens' integration and a progressive identification with Europe, accepting differences and highlighting similarities. It is essential to create common policies beyond economic recovery."***

*from responses to the survey*

**"EDUCATION IS THE BASIS OF SOCIETY AND THE ONLY THING, WHICH IF IT IS DONE PROPERLY (IT IS NOT IN MOST CASES) CAN PROVIDE SOLUTIONS TO CURRENT ISSUES."**

*from responses to the survey*

## DIRECT POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

Young people feel excluded from politics, both because their opinions are not always taken seriously in policy debates and because few of their contemporaries are elected to office in the EU; only 57 out of 766 members in the EP are less than 40 years old, while a mere two of those are below 30. The question is why there are so few people from these age groups involved in European politics directly? Is the current political system not fit for young spirits? Do young Europeans feel they are not experienced enough to join the political arena?

Political representation should be understood as the representation of similar values and ideas, rather than merely an expression of age, interests, demographic or geographic background. Not all young people have the same interests and they could very well feel represented by someone with a very different profile or age than they themselves. At the same time, younger members do tend to prioritise youth issues more than older members. The question therefore remains how the current problems of these generations are best fed into the political debate. Should political structures be made more accessible to young Europeans and their views on European policy?

*“[...] there are not enough new candidates that could represent my generation and understand the problems of the new generation. The future of the EU is young people and in particular people between 15-30”*

*from responses to the survey*

The goal has to be to create a political system that equally represents young and old, men and women, from all regions in Europe. This is clearly not the case for the young generations at the moment, making measures to improve this deficiency necessary. Politicising the elections could help improve the situation and in order to welcome young people into the political debate and increase their activity, it is also necessary to address the policy issues that concern them. However, this is not enough.

Political parties are still the main actors in nominating candidates, writing election programmes and running the campaign, yet are best placed to start political debates and run the campaigns. So they should make an effort to include the voice of their young electorate in their political agenda and strive to connect to the younger generations.

Unfortunately, only 2% of young Europeans are members of a political party. This leaves us with a problematic situation: why should a group of people be taken seriously if they are not only largely ignoring the ballot-box, but also refuse to participate in the traditional political life of party membership? Disregarding political party systems is not a recent trend, and a discussion about innovation of democracy and increasing

the influence of civil society has rightfully been initiated. But currently political parties still overpower the political stage, which means that for now it is important that young people become active in political party systems in order to achieve greater power.

Young people should accept their responsibility if they want influence the public debate. However, to get more youth actively involved, political parties need to include young people in positions of responsibility and nominate them as candidates in elections, such as for the EP elections. In last election only 19% of the candidates were aged between 16 and 35, while the age group represents 26% of the EU population. There is an even more significant under-representation of young people actually in the EP. Twice as many young people would have to be elected to be proportionately represented.

Including more young politicians on party lists can act as a catalyst for youth voter turnout. In the survey many of the respondents were in favour of having more young candidates in the EP elections and mentioned that to be an encouragement to vote. This was especially the case in new member countries, where 53% of respondents expressed their wish for a more proportionate representation. Naturally, it is easier to identify with someone of a similar age, but respondents also believe that young members of European Parliament are better suited to represent their interests and grow political attention to young people's greatest concerns.

**“POLITICALLY  
INCENTIVISE YOUNG  
PEOPLE AS EARLY  
AS POSSIBLE.”**

**“WE NEED TO SEND  
MORE COMPETENT  
PEOPLE TO EUROPE.”**

*from responses to the survey*



**“WITHOUT POLITICAL COMMUNICATION  
THERE IS NO DEMOCRACY”**

*from responses to the survey*

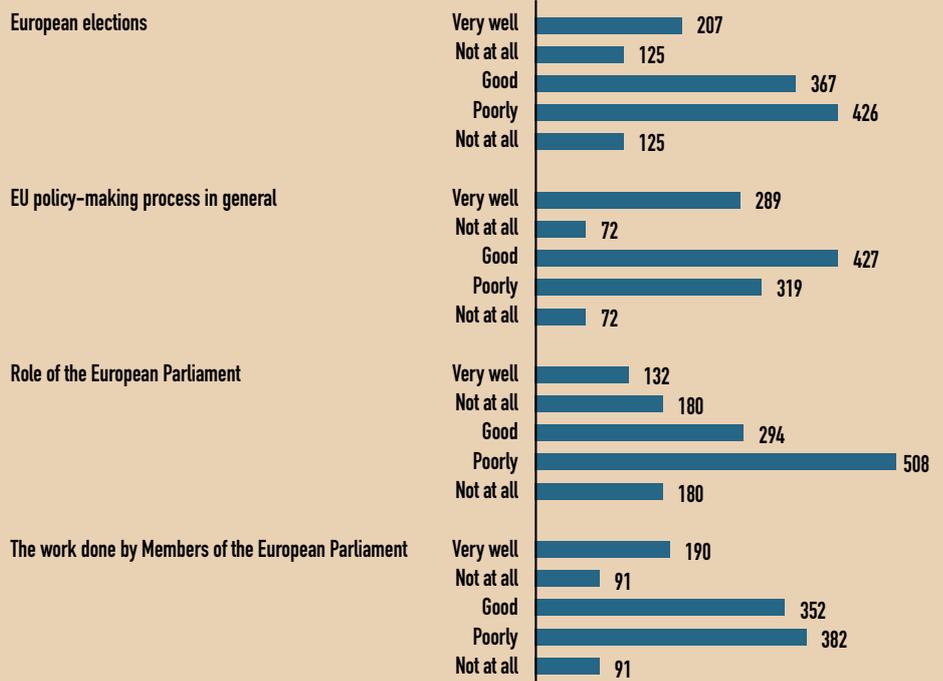


# INFORMING YOUNG EUROPEANS

# “SURVEY RESPONDENTS CLEARLY HAVE DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES ON THE CONCEPT OF A DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT”

comment by the authors

## How well do you feel informed about the following:



Previous chapters already hinted at the importance of properly informing young people throughout the EU. One example so far was that young people are skeptical about the way their interests are currently represented at the EU level, even though in recent years there have been several programmes which tackle the problems young Europeans consider most important: education and employment. So if young Europeans are not convinced by these efforts, the European institutions should perhaps also reconsider their communication strategies in order to build trust among its young electorate.

**“I don’t even know who the candidates are. Why should I care?”**

from responses to the survey

Besides serving as a ‘marketing’ instrument for good policy initiatives, transparency and access to information are above all basic democratic principles. Without adequate communication, people lack the necessary information to vote for those who best fit their interests. The FutureLab Europe survey respondents indicate that such a lack of information is the most important cause of their reluctance to vote. Not only do they admit that their knowledge of the EU is limited, they also feel in the dark when it comes to European party’s manifestos, election programmes at the national level or the quality of candidates. This lack of information leads to a democratic deficit in two ways: first, young voters do not have sufficient knowledge to make an intelligent choice; and second, a lack of information leads to apathy and a low election turnout.

**“When we look at it in detail, there is no democratic deficit in the EU. Yet, there is a strong lack of information on how policies impact our day-to-day lives and what consequences newly voted policies generate.”**

**“Yes, there is a democratic deficit. One gets the impression that members of European Parliament are not accountable to the citizens, and that the Commission is not accountable to anyone. There are numerous bodies that are bureaucratic and which are not elected by the citizens.”**

from responses to the survey

So what information needs to be communicated to young Europeans? And through which channels? This chapter will discuss what role education, European institutions and political

## How well do you feel informed about the following:



**“MOST  
LIKELY  
ONCE AGAIN  
I WILL  
VOTE FOR  
“THE LESSER EVIL”.”**

*from responses to the survey*



parties, (mass) media, social media and civil society can play in informing young Europeans about the European elections, European policies, and the EU in general.

## EDUCATION

***“I like the idea of the creation of space for citizens to directly input in the processes of the European Commission and the European Parliament.”***

*from responses to the survey*

According to the survey results, young people are convinced that they would be more interested in the elections if they had learned more about the EU policy-making process in school. Yet, education still focuses mostly on domestic governmental systems and local issues, even when European subjects are discussed.

The survey results show that young people’s knowledge about the EU institutions is limited, even though they are still in school or recently graduated. This is not an issue of individual countries or specific regions, but a problem throughout Europe. This calls for a change across the board, and improving the way the European political dimension is taught in schools is an excellent place to start. With better education on what happens at the EU level, young people would be more likely to develop an interest in EU politics, understand what the discussions and issues are, and to participate actively later in their lives.

## EU INSTITUTIONS AND POLITICAL PARTIES

Almost a third of the respondents of the FutureLab Europe survey indicated that better information campaigns would make them more interested in the European elections. The European Parliament started such a campaign for the European elections in the summer of 2013, using the slogans “Act. React. Impact.” and “You think you have no power? Think again.” The campaign uses emotive content, and different mediums. One example is a lengthy film which focuses on individuals instead of a more abstract notion of the European Union. It is an attempt to break the general assumption that European inclusion is still a top-down project by seeking to reach everybody, regardless of political preference or nationality. This makes the transnational voter motivation campaign less controversial and more broadly acceptable. By addressing only general and abstract concepts however, the campaign does not really speak directly to people’s concerns. While for obvious reasons a campaign organised by a European institution is not suited for controversial political language, it could have been more informative about the EU and the (policy) question where the EU can and does contribute to society.

To complement such a general campaign by the EU institutions, the role of political parties and political party programmes remains key. The respondents of the survey indicate that they expect their interest in the elections for the European Parliament to increase, if there was a better communication campaign by the

national candidates and their parties. People need a direct connection to political topics to feel an immediate impact of EU policy.

***“Members should more often meet with their voters in their constituencies; feel the regional disparities and living standard”***

*from responses to the survey*

Unfortunately, looking at previous European elections traditional political parties do not seem willing to build strong election campaigns around European issues. Political parties either do not see the relevance of a strong representation on the EU level or are afraid that focusing their European election campaigns on European issues will alienate voters. Or could it be a simple question of budget, forcing the parties to limit the scope of their campaigns? Whatever the reason, we must conclude that in order to close the gap between young people’s vote and the European reality, political parties need to take responsibility and be more specific on their political agendas in European matters, especially when it comes to youth issues. Political parties should focus on explaining the importance of the European elections in general and identifying where they intend to exercise political influence. FutureLab Europe participants feel that more attention could go to specific candidates, the election programmes and the European wide problems they intend to address.

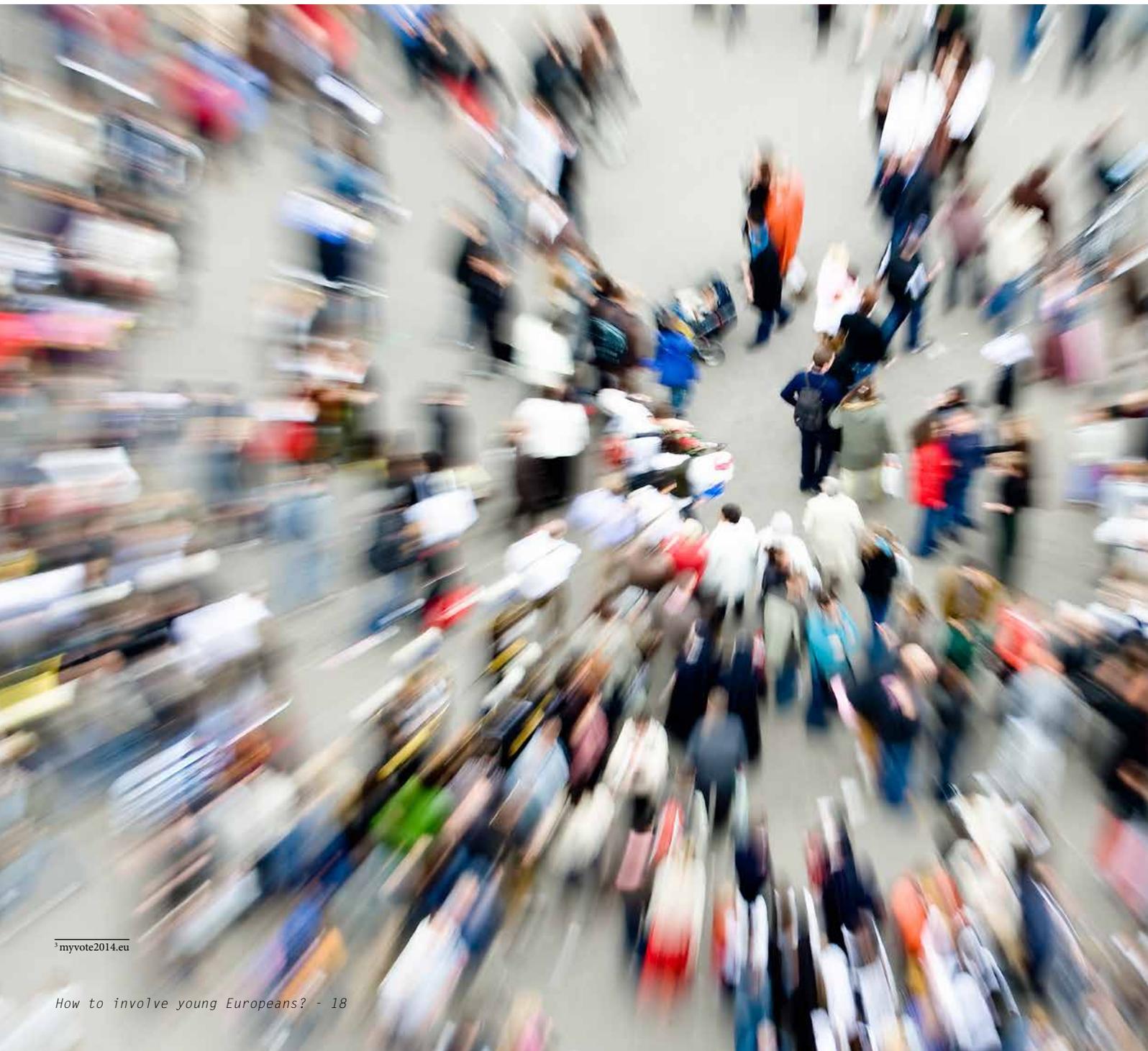
## MASS MEDIA, SOCIAL MEDIA AND OTHER PLATFORMS

While education, the EU institutions and political parties certainly play a part in building knowledge on EU in general, media, civil society organisations and businesses play an even more fundamental and continuous role in discussing concrete policy issues. These actors could report on current EU policy debates more structurally. An advantage is also that these platforms provide the opportunity to translate EU affairs to the local and regional level. Here, the EU institutions and different political views can actually be linked to people's daily lives.

*“Better media coverage of EP activity and of the election campaign in the member states combined with a clearer presentation of the practical consequences of the decisions of this body on “ordinary citizens” could bring more young disengaged Europeans to the polls.” says Doris Manu from FutureLab Europe, “The elections to the EP are not really visible at the national level and even less at the local level. Media coverage of EU affairs in individual member states is almost non-existent, therefore most young people don’t know how the EU and its institutions function and don’t know how the EU impacts their lives. They are therefore not informed, or motivated enough to cast their vote.”*

*As Christopher Wratil from FutureLab Europe puts it: “I fear [campaigns] will not really be fruitful as long as the EU does not become politicised in national media.”*

The survey results show that very little information about the EU is provided through mass media and even less information comes through on the different political camps within the European Parliament. The EU decision-making process rarely gets discussed; rather, final decisions are announced. That's why controversial opinions within the European Parliament never reach the public. If disagreements on the European level are described, they are usually represented by the



respective heads of states, leaving the European Parliament out of the debate. The way the system works, (with parties, MEPs and lengthy discussions), therefore remains unknown to the general public. A political debate is adequately conveyed when media offer a platform to different viewpoints, with which the viewer or reader can agree or disagree. Unfortunately, mass media currently seems to encourage the public to take either a pro-European or Eurosceptic position, instead of seeing different opinions within the European Union, thus nipping the politicisation of the debate in the bud.

By many, national elections are seen as the

most important or even the only important election, which puts the European elections, together with the regional and local elections, in the category “second-order national contest” for mass media. ‘Europe’ is mainly seen as a motivation to turn off the TV or radio. If the elections would be more politicised, as this publication has argued, it could incite debate and thus making it more likely that the media cover EU politics on a continuous basis.

Finally, non-governmental organisations, think tanks and trade associations do a better job of transmitting useful election information on specific policy issues. These organisations inform the public about actual news from

the European institutions, albeit from the perspective of their specific interests. There are also several tools available to help voters find out which party is closest to their ideology. One online platform that tries to make European politics more transparent in an easy, playful way is MyVote<sup>3</sup>, an initiative of VoteWatch Europe. The target group of the website is young and first-time voters, to whom the site offers games to familiarise oneself with European politics, or experience what it is like to be an MEP. Such initiatives are most welcome but can have a hard time reaching the intended audience as they often struggle with limited resources and media coverage.



**“FORTUNATELY,  
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YOUNGSTERS WILL BE THE ONES  
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GENUINE IDEAS IN PRACTICE.  
WHAT I HOPE IS THAT  
ON THAT DAY,  
THEY DO LISTEN TO  
YOUNGER GENERATIONS.”**

*from responses to the survey*

# CONCLUDING REMARKS

We have already seen improvements in the opportunities for young Europeans to take part in and exercise influence over EU policy. Also, according to the survey results, a majority of young people are inclined to vote for the upcoming European elections. However, only a small minority of youth is involved in citizen's initiatives, runs for elections or has voted in last European elections. This paper has discussed several causes and possible improvements to bridge the world between young Europeans and European policy makers.

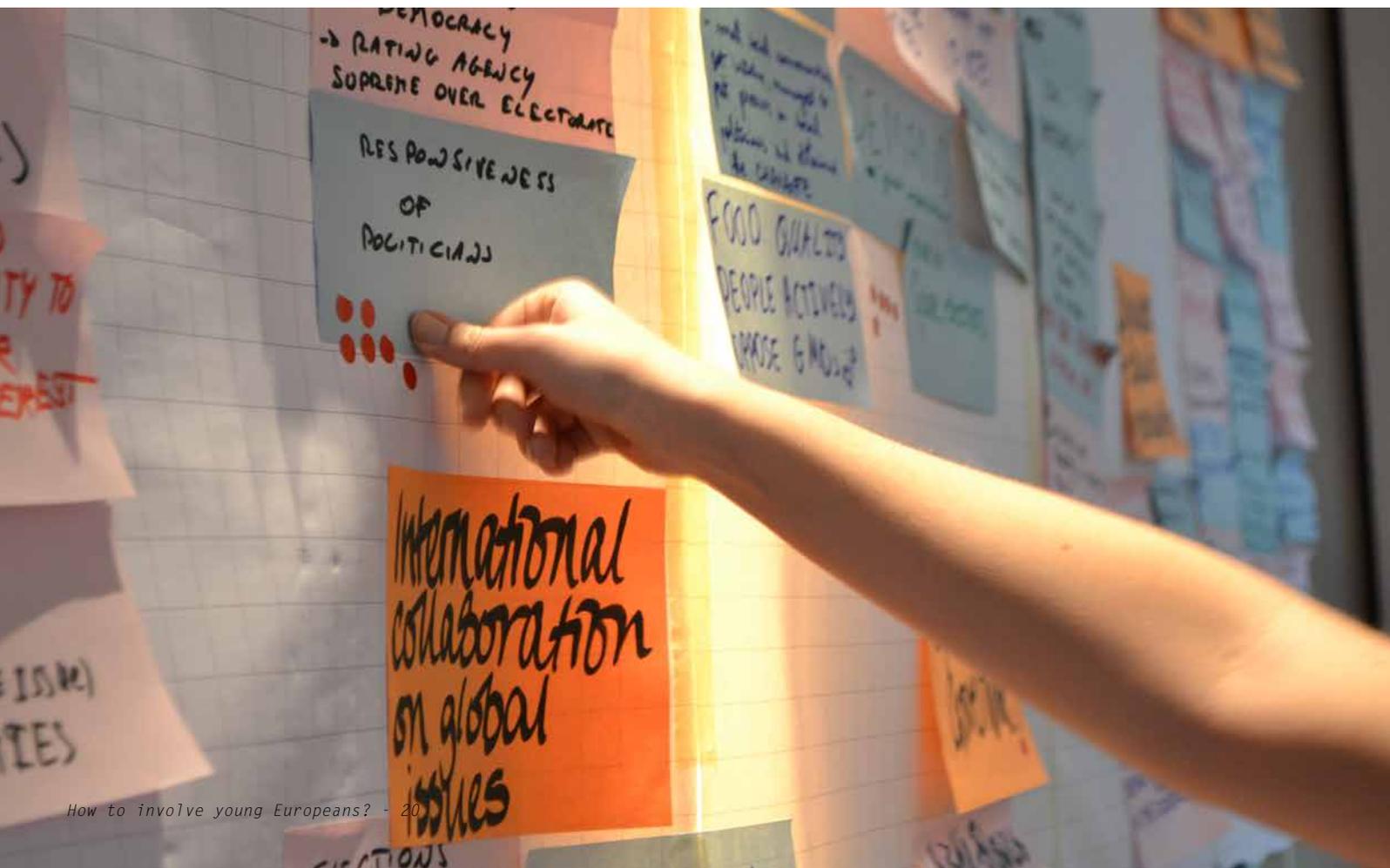
First the institutional role of the EP should become even stronger and clearer, as it is the only direct way voters are connected to the EU. The link between the elections and the composition of the European Commission, now done in part through the EP, should also be strengthened, for example by direct election of the Commission president. This is part of an effort to politicise the European elections. Another important tool for making European political choices more tangible for young people, and people in

general would be the creation of a Europe wide political system and candidate list. This would guarantee a more 'European election' and increase the interest to vote, certainly among young people.

Secondly, the representation of young people at the EU level needs to improve. Such representation should consist of candidates and parties that appeal to young voters, a higher youth turnout at the polling stations, but also more topics on the political agenda that interest young Europeans. Employment and education are the key policy areas for young people, but the FutureLab Europe survey showed that environmental policy, citizen's participation and mobility are also seen as important issues. Political parties have to nominate more young candidates to fight the perception that young Europeans are not sufficiently represented, but should also clearly outline how they plan to tackle problems concerning the young, thus motivating young voters to cast their ballot.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, communication between European politics and young Europeans needs to drastically improve. Knowledge about the political structure and the decision making process in general is less than desirable but information on current personalities in European politics, political parties' role in the EU and their programmes for the EP elections, is virtually non-existent. Schools and EU campaigns can contribute to closing this information deficit, but the main problem lies in the reluctance of national media and national parties to discuss the EU on its political merits.

Back to the hopeful signs that came out of the FutureLab Europe survey, young Europeans do acknowledge that the EU has great potential on many different policy areas. This seems all the more reason for young people to get into politics and express their views. This way, they can call for those things they find important for a future Europe: better communication to European citizens, European wide elections and more power to the EP.



FutureLab Europe participants have been blogging about the salient topics for the future of Europe on the FutureLab Europe website. This chapter contains some of the highlights of the posted blogs, on themes related to youth participation in democratic life. The full text of these blog posts can be found on [www.futurelabeurope.eu](http://www.futurelabeurope.eu).

***Democracy is like a long-term relationship: exhausting, but rewarding.***  
**By Miruna Troncota**

“My question for people who claim they have “lost faith in the EU” is really simple. Think in business terms. How can you trust a partner you do not interact with? Before deciding to be passive in EU related debates and before criticizing the EU all day long for its democratic deficit we should simply do our homework –inform ourselves on main EU issues, interact with the EU by active engagement in public debates and by voting in the European elections. This is how trust can be built on the long run. How can you build a partnership in “a blind date”? If we want to manifest our anger at the EU by widening its democratic deficit, then we contribute to the problem itself instead of finding a solution. I would not go for a “blind date” with European institutions because I would never trust them that way. I would rather build a partnership that would be in my best interest as an EU citizen. And for that I need to engage in the public arena. I need interaction with the EU in order to find solutions, not using it as the perfect ‘scape goat’ for all the bad things in this world.

(...) Democracy needs a self-reflective demos in order to function. Democracy is the name we put to the long-term relationship between the people and their political representatives. It needs commitment, openness and adaptability and these are the main features of a ‘demos’. This may seem common sense, but looking at some recent figures we ask ourselves what happened to Europe’s demos? According to Eurostat, 96 million people are categorized as youth in the EU, amounting to 19.5% of the total EU population. If we add to this number the very low turnout at the last European Parliament elections (33% of 18-24 year olds in 2004 and 29% in 2009) we can conclude that EU’s demos lacks precisely what it needs the most – its young citizens.”

***European democracy: Do young people need to know more about EU politics or do politicians need to be better informed about youth issues?***  
**By Marta Remacha**

“Obviously the EU has not abandoned their youngsters and has put many programmes into practice in order to involve them in EU policy debates. Various scholarship and language exchange programmes, simulation models of the European Parliament and programmes such as Young Volunteering, Youth for Europe and Youth in Action are only few of the examples of European initiatives that attempt to involve younger generations. However, are politicians taking into account the output from these initiatives?

Not as much as they should in my opinion. Young people are using new communication tools, such as assemblies or online platforms, to express their views. But these views do not reach the political arena of the European Union. Young people also keep themselves informed through a wide range of new media, such as social media, alternative newspapers and blogs. But these are not taken into account in campaigns by most traditional political parties. Political programmes in general show very few references to youth issues, which indicates that conventional parties do not care about young Europeans. Is this the case because young voters are the smallest group of voters?

# FUTURELAB EUROPE PERSPECTIVES

While new forms of participation (e-democracy, liquid democracy, direct democracy) are being proposed, so far politicians easily put them aside. Up to this point, my recommendation for the forthcoming campaign is that politicians, rather than informing the public and broadcasting their opinions, start by listening to what young people are actually telling them. Politicians should acknowledge the current gap between generations, and make concrete attempts to overcome differences that prevent that gap from getting bigger.

Fortunately, one day the current youngsters will be the ones in power and put these genuine ideas in practice. I can only hope that on that day, they do listen to younger generations.”

***Why democracy needs education***  
**By Veronika Sobolová**

“... a majority of young people are generally dissatisfied about the way government and politics are organised. Among others, we felt that political parties broadly ignore young people’s interests, which is at the same time, a reason to stay away from democratic processes. Looking for solutions to tackle this lack of belief in the current state of democracy, we identified that education plays a fundamental role in overcoming the negative perception of young people towards politics. In particular, we feel that in the educational process there is not enough attention paid to public affairs and (European) citizenship.

Democracy is a form of social organization that should be learnt and experienced again and again by every generation in order to remain vital. Studies confirm that educated societies tend to be more stable democracies, with stronger citizen participation<sup>4</sup>.

In this respect, knowledge of democratic principles -such as the right to vote- is essential, but should be seen as a minimum. The aim of education should also be to increase the understanding of the basic democratic processes, their application and transfer to next generations. Educational institutions offer the perfect stage to engage young people with political processes. For example, having more opportunities to discuss the current political issues in the classrooms would lead to a greater interest of young people in politics in general. Also, this could help improving their critical thinking and communication skills.”

<sup>4</sup> See eg. Edward Glaeser & Giacomo Ponzetto & Andrei Shleifer, 2007. “Why does democracy need education?” *Journal of Economic Growth*, Springer, vol. 12(2), pages 77-99, June. Available online: [http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/glaeser/files/democracy\\_final\\_jeg\\_1.pdf](http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/glaeser/files/democracy_final_jeg_1.pdf)[http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/glaeser/files/democracy\\_final\\_jeg\\_1.pdf](http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/glaeser/files/democracy_final_jeg_1.pdf) How to involve young Europeans? - 20 les/democracy\_final\_jeg\_1.pdf

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# APPENDIX A: INFORMATION ON SURVEY RESPONDENTS

## TOTAL RESPONDENTS: 1119

North-West: 227 responses, 20.2%:

Austria (16), Belgium (13), Denmark (3), Finland (29), France (25), Germany (91), Ireland (15), Netherlands (7), Sweden (23), United Kingdom (5)

South: 260 responses, 23.2%

Greece (89), Italy (61), Portugal (6), Spain (104)

CEEC/SE: 444 responses, 39.7%

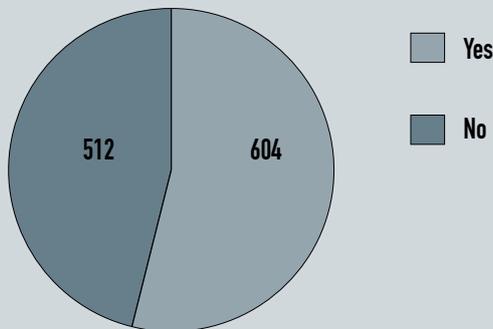
Bulgaria (93), Croatia (34), Czech Republic (12), Estonia (3), Hungary (4), Latvia (1), Lithuania (5), Poland (15), Romania (203), Slovakia (73), Slovenia (1)

Non-EU member states / potential candidate countries: 188 responses, 16.8%

Albania (122), Macedonia (13), Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia Herzegovina (53)

## CHARACTERISTICS

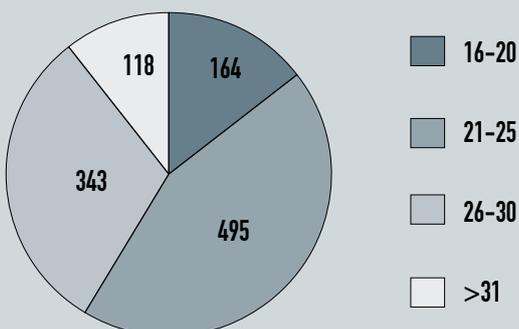
Have you ever studied or worked in a country other than your country of citizenship?



Do you currently reside in the country of your citizenship?



Age of participants



Region of origin



# APPENDIX B: SURVEY QUESTIONS

## QUESTIONNAIRE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AHEAD OF THE EP ELECTION: 'WHAT IS IN IT FOR ME?'

This survey is an initiative by the FutureLab Europe programme for empowering young voices. Results will be published on [www.futurelabeurope.eu](http://www.futurelabeurope.eu) and presented to László Andor, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion at the occasion of the "Europe@Debate" in Brussels in April 2014.

### 1. In your opinion, how engaged are young people in your country in the following?

*The respondents could choose between very well – good – poorly – not at all*

- Casting their vote in the elections (national, regional or local)
- Protest movements
- Civil disobedience
- Petitions
- Participation in associations within civil society
- Other, innovative forms of democracy

Please specify any of the innovative forms of democracy you are aware of: ...

### 2. Do you know that there will be European Parliament elections in May 2014?

- Yes
- no
- I don't know

### 3. How well do you feel informed about the following?

*The respondents could choose between very well – good – poorly – not at all*

- EU policy-making process in general
- Role of the European Parliament
- The work done by the Members of the European Parliament
- European elections
- Programme of the candidates in your country
- Programme of the candidates in your country concerning young people
- Process of casting your vote in the European elections
- Where to get relevant information from

### 4. Which of the following policy issues do you consider of key relevance?

*The respondents could choose multiple of the options below*

- Employment
- Education
- Mobility (within the EU)
- Access to information
- Data protection
- Citizen participation
- Environmental protection
- Solidarity between European countries
- Solidarity among European citizens
- Solidarity of Europeans with the rest of the world (eg. asylum seekers, humanitarian aid recipients)
- Europe's role in the world
- Other (please specify): ...

### 5. Which of the key policy issues is the most important for you and why? Open question

### 6. Are you planning to vote in the European elections 2014?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know
- Not applicable, as I am not an EU citizen

### 7. If you replied 'yes' to the previous question, could you explain? If you replied 'no' to the previous question, is there something that would motivate you to vote? Open question

### 8. Do you feel spoken to by the political program(s) of the candidates/parties? Open question

### 9. What would you want the European Parliament to change about the EU? Open question

### 10. I would be more interested to vote in the European elections if:

*The respondents could choose multiple of the options below*

- More information was reaching me
- The elections were more politicised along the lines of 'left'/'right' political spectrum
- The European Parliament could choose the Commission President and other Commissioners directly
- If I could vote for the Commission President directly
- There were Europe-wide candidate lists to choose from
- There was a better communication campaign by the European Parliament
- There was a better communication campaign by the candidate members for European Parliament in my country
- There were more young candidates to choose from
- More information about the EU policy-making would be taught at school
- Other (please specify): ...

### 11. How could the European Parliament become more accessible to its citizens? Open question

### 12. In your opinion, is there a democratic deficit in the EU? Please explain? Open question

### 13. Background information about the respondent:

- Age (16-20/ 21-25/ 26-30/>31)
- Gender
- Nationality
- Do you currently reside in the country of your citizenship?
- Have you ever studied or worked in a country other than your country of citizenship?

# ABOUT THIS REPORT

The following FutureLab Europe participants contributed to the production of this publication as well as carried out the survey in various languages: Estefanía Almenta López, Marsida Bandilli, Maël Baseilhac, Lukas Brück, Andréa Chabant Sánchez, Miloš Đinđić, Max Eklund, Dorit Fauck, Lukáš Fůčela, Sandra Grindgärds, Srđan Hercigonja, Konstantina Karydi, Germán Jiménez Montes, Anna Karolin, Stephan Kool, Andrei Liimets, Doris Manu, Theodora Matziropoulou, Ia Melkadze, Georgi Michev, Arpine Nazaryan, Konstantinos Ntantonos, Sanna Ojanperä, Tonje Olsrud, Afrola Plaku, Marta Remacha, Ninja Schmiedgen, Lotta Schneidmesser, Veronika Sobolová, Ivan Stefanovski, Sadik Tabar, Miruna Troncota and Christopher Wratil

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The whole report was edited by Wouter de Iongh from ODS and Linde Zuidema, FutureLab Europe Programme Leader. Further editorial guidance was provided by Zuzana Nováková, FutureLab Europe Programme Executive and Zakeera Suffee, Communications Executive at the European Policy Centre.

The foreword was written by Carl Haglund, Minister of Defence in Finland and former Member of the European Parliament

Photographs courtesy of Jennifer Jacquemart, Doru Toma, European Policy Centre and Real Maestranza de Caballeria de Ronda and pursued from Shutterstock.

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# ABOUT FUTURELAB EUROPE

Europe has to be a “citizen project” in order to succeed. It needs fresh ideas and innovative concepts as well as a strong supportive base from among its younger generations. For FutureLab Europe, ten European Foundations from Spain to Estonia, from Norway to Italy – with the help of the Network of European Foundations joined forces with the European Policy Centre in Brussels – assembling experiences, resources and – most of all – their outstanding Alumni. The programme currently has 68 participants coming from 27 countries – EU-Member states as well as Non-Member states.

FutureLab Europe empowers young voices on the topics of democracy and participation, equal opportunities, youth unemployment, European identity and Europe’s limits. Participants of FutureLab Europe develop their own ideas and positions on matters of European relevance and take responsibility and action now, in order to help build the Europe of the future. Through their blog, in public debates and through their individual projects our participants share their young perspective on Europe.

## FUTURELAB EUROPE

### European Alliance for Democratic Citizenship



Belgium



Estonia



Finland



Finland

Robert Bosch Stiftung

Germany



Germany



Italy



Norway



Portugal



Spain

### Alliance partners

Operational partner



Affiliated to





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