



PARTICIPATION IN CIVIL SOCIETY

Y VOTE CONVENTION
DÜSSELDORF, GERMANY

RESULTS BOOKLET

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Dear reader,

Not so many years ago, I found people striving for something I thought was self-explanatory: Democracy. I found people that think young people should have a say. I did not know if my input would be of any value, but I knew that those topics were relevant and important to me. Since then, I have been engaged in Civil Society - simply said: I try to do my part to make the world a better place.



In many events I attended since then, I have met many people working on amazing projects. We all come from a very diverse continent, but most of us share a common goal: To make Europe a better place. Our voices are being listened to, if we speak up.

This event especially aimed at seeing how we can make this happen constructively - and it was amazing to see the engagement in every single persons face. Participants, guests, trainers and organisers have worked hand in hand to foster amazing discussions - not only in the sessions, but from dusk till dawn. This, as well as many amazing people will stay in our memories.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'P. Blum', with a stylized, flowing script.

Philipp Blum

Project Manager of the Y Vote Project

Dear reader,

quite some years ago I was catapulted into the world of political affairs, I passionately observed the evolving political situations of some countries of the European Union. Frustration arose as I saw the developing anti-EU sentiment, the willingness of national politics to lie about the European level to cover up their own mistakes was terrifying. The failure of civil society to correct and defend from this was demoralising.



Since then a lot has happened and many believe we're facing a crossroads for the EU and the task that the Y Vote team has taken charge of is a large one, but with these conventions we've tried and managed to mobilise youth to take the lead and raise their voice. Showing that young people truly are a power to be reckoned with in society and that the energy that they bring to it can lead to a lot of change.

If the majority of young people, was like the participants in this convention, civil society would be thriving. Willing to be informed, taking according positions, facing the current decision makers and holding them to account for their actions. Hopefully the participants will take what they learned and created, combine it with their incredible energy and share it with others.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Leonardo Manganelli'.

Leonardo Manganelli

Content Manager of the Y Vote Project

The Convention

As a project, Y Vote wants to encourage young people to make informed choices at the European Parliament elections and learn more about topics that are relevant for young Europeans. One way to achieve this are the Y Vote Conventions that are structured along the topics of the [EU Youth Strategy 2010-2018](#). The participants learn about the functioning of the EU and discuss how to become active citizens.

The V Vote Convention on Participation in Civil Society was the 4th event of this kind. Between 5th and 10th of February 2019, 35 participants from all over Europe gathered. With a focus on the the topic of [Participation](#), the convention consisted of different parts aiming at:

1. Understanding the EU structure and the election process.
2. Having discussions with and without policy makers about Creativity and Culture.
3. Improving the impact of associations on civil society.
4. Learning about possibilities to improve the impact of associations on civil society.
5. Draft recommendations in the form of a Youth Agenda that will be brought to policy makers.



The topic was especially interesting for the project, as the official objectives fall very much in line with ours:

1. to develop mechanisms to engaging in dialogue with young people and facilitate their participation in the shaping of national policies;
2. to support youth organisations, including local and national youth councils;
3. to promote participation of under-represented groups of young people in politics, youth organisations, and other civil society organisations;
4. to support ways of 'learning to participate' from an early age.

The recommendations are later brought to our final conference in April 2019, which will happen in Torino, Italy. Together with other NGOs and participants from all over the continent, we will gather all recommendations from all conventions into one Youth Agenda for Europe.

Workshops, presentations and discussions

We believe a solid fundament is important for everyone to have the possibility to participate properly in discussions. Furthermore, during discussions and practical assignments, participants get to practise their soft-skills, such as public speaking, presenting, pitching their ideas and more.



Introduction to the European Union

The European Union with its history and institutions is a complex system that we all heard about somehow, but we need to understand a little in order to really discuss its influence. After all, the EU institutions are the European peoples' institutions. In these sessions, participants learned about the history of the European Union, 4 European Institutions and their competences as well as the [competences](#) of the EU vs. the member states.



Civil society within the European Union

The area of civil society can be defined broadly as a distinct sector from politics consisting of an aggregate of non-governmental organizations and institutions that manifest interests and will of citizens. Within the last years, the sector saw an important rise in public attention. Prof. Richter of RWTH gave an interesting lecture and discussed with participants about various aspects.

Fishbowl discussion

A [fishbowl discussion](#) is just one of many ways to foster a discussion and to make sure voices can be heard in a structured way. Two circles were formed: The people in the inner circle were allowed to speak, the others had to be silent. Interesting and heated discussions emerged about the following topics:

The voting age should be lowered to 16 years.
The age to buy alcohol should be lowered to 16 years.
You can be a political representative at 18 years old.

The first and last of these aspect match with campaigns that the European Youth Forum runs, namely [Vote 16](#) as well as [Not too young to run](#).



This time I'm voting: EU-elections

In May 2019, the EU member states are electing a new European parliament. More than ever it is important to vote – taking into consideration the populist or right wing movements mobilizing growing parts of the population. Taking action though does not only refer to casting a vote personally, but as well to promote voting among the personal network and in the personal community.

Social media influence on civil society

An important factor for a deep change in civil society can be seen in the rise of social media. On the one hand side enlarging the outreach for cases civil society is striving, for, it cuts on the other hand the focus of the audience. How to profit from it? Make use of new advantages, civil society dreamt of decades ago.

Public Speaking and presentations

Public speaking is not only a fancy term for those who those who present in big theatres - we believe it is a basic skill young people need to make sure their voices are heard in the best manner.

To accomplish this, best practises were shared on the content, as well as the formal aspects of a speech, presentation or elevator pitch. Participants later used these skills to talk to people on the street, to do TED-Style talks and to take part in simulation games.

Best Practises of NGOs

Participation is a wide term, and it was our intention to show as many aspects of it as possible. Therefore, guests were invited to talk about different approaches, from cultural aspects and european NGOs to real political parties:

- **“Advocacy for (religious) NGOs”**
Hanife Tosun, Interkultureller Dialog e.V.
The organisation organises cultural, religious and educational exchange between Muslim and Christian culture.
www.ikult.com
- **“How to explain EU and European Federalism?”**
Juho Mölsä, JEF Helsinki
The goal of the Young European Federalists (JEF) is the creation of a democratic European federation as a crucial ingredient for peace, a guarantee for a more free, just and democratic society and a first step towards a world federation.
www.jef.eu
- **“House Parliaments” & “ECI”**
Daniela Vancic, Democracy International
Democracy International wants to realise more direct democracy, and has enough of decisions taken by a small circle of politicians behind closed doors. They believe in the power of direct democracy to better our lives.
www.democracy-international.org
- **VOLT, Young European Spirit**
“European Parties”
Both VOLT, as well as YES are pan-european parties, and try to change politics towards a more European sphere.
www.volteuropa.org
www.youngeuropeanspirit.eu

We would like to thank all guests and point out that it's impossible to describe the complete picture of each organisation in this short way. We encourage you to visit their websites and inform yourself!



Local actions & campaigning in theory

Going on the street and informing people about elections seems easy - but it takes more than just time. Questions such as "Who do I approach?", "Do I go alone or in a group" and "Where do I position myself" arise.

But most importantly: "What do I say when someone stops?". Various ideas came up and participants went on to practise their skills.



Policy & advocacy for NGOs: Concepts of the Y Vote project

One outcome of this Convention is a set of recommendations - something we'd like to see happening on a European Scale. But at the same time, regional politics has a lot of influence. To tackle this, Y Vote has drafted a Manifesto to make it easier for young people to get in touch with their local policy makers.

By signing this manifesto, the municipality pledges to carry out activities which improve the participation of youth in society connected to areas of the EU Youth Strategy.

Every participant had something dear to their heart. Something they'd like to see happening or changed in their city. Quickly, ideas were drawn up and great plans made. To conclude our cycle in training young people in talking with policy makers, a role-play was put into place where the participants had to present their ideas to the mayor of their city.

Discussion with Policy Makers

An integral part of any Erasmus+ event under [Key Action 3: Support for Policy Reform](#) is “Meetings between Young People and Decision Makers in the field of youth”. Exactly this was done, by not only meeting one, but three European Policy makers.

Open discussion with Tibor Navracsics (EU Commissioner) and Sabine Verheyen (MEP)

As much Europe as possible - the wish of most participants. EU Commissioner Navracsics has a slightly different view on things.

In two hours participants and policy makers went there and back, mostly about the famous Erasmus Programme. More Europe, less national politics was often mentioned, but both Mr. Navracsics and Mrs. Verheyen made clear that the EU Institutions have only a recommending role in many aspects of politics. Furthermore, it was pointed out that the EU's motto “United in Diversity” is a key aspect, and that it's not feasible to implement the same policies in Finland as in Italy.

More about this discussion can be found in [RP Online](#) (German).



Tibor Navracsics is the current European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport. Having graduated in law and politics, Tibor Navracsics already served as member of the Hungarian parliament and Hungarian minister of foreign affairs and trade. Since 2014, he accounts for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport in the European Commission. Part of his political responsibilities is among others to create opportunities for young people to fully participate in civic and democratic life.



Sabine Verheyen is a Member of the European Parliament as part of the the European People's Party. As patron of the Y Vote project, she says: “I am happy to support the “Y Vote” campaign because I think it is important to exercise one's democratic right to vote. For me, voting also means taking responsibility as a citizen. And bearing in mind that the right to vote is not a matter of course in many countries, we should once again become aware of this privilege and make use of it. I would like to encourage young people in particular to take part in the European elections in May 2019 and use their vote to play a part in shaping Europe's future.”

Discussion about Civil Society with Arndt Kohn (MEP)

Having had the chance to get used to ask decision makers questions the participants felt much more comfortable during the discussion on Civil Society, there was a clear contrast to the previous panel when it came to the content, as it seemed that the “What ifs” and “Would it be possible” were discussed much more in depth. This also meant in the end that Mr. Kohn faced some quite challenging questions which the participants enjoyed hearing answers to.



Arndt Kohn is also a Member of the European Parliament for Germany. He is member of the group of progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in The European Parliament. In Germany he is running for the Social Democratic Party. Kohn is from Stollberg a small city close to Aachen. With his profession as a banker, he is an expert for financial topics in the parliament. Thus, he is e.g. member of the Committee on Budgetary Control.

Social aspect

Get to know games

Groups become teams when people know each other. Therefore, several [name games, ice breaking games and similar](#) were put into place to make people familiar with each others names, hobbies and personalities.

Daily feedback

Exchange of feedback between participants, trainers and organisers is a core quality measurement we practise in every event. Every evening, small groups gather to discuss their feelings during the day and the program is adjusted accordingly. For example, the program was shifted to start and end later to avoid morning hectic at breakfast.

Cultural Dinner

The so-called Cultural Dinner - also known under similar names across many youth organisations - is a place where participants can share the culture, food and drinks of their respective country. Between Jámón and Belarusian Chocolate, participants showed their imagination with German Potato Salad, Finnish Chocolate and regional flags made out of vegetables.

Recommendation writing

In order to allow participants to create recommendations we allowed them to brainstorm ideas, by allowing them shout out ideas that they had gathered during the event, no discussions were allowed in this stage to permit a free flow of ideas.

Right after, the trainers clustered the topics into nine overarching themes (clusters), after which with 5 votes per participant they could vote on these. The top four clusters chosen were "Mental Health", "Education (Media Literacy)", "Social inclusion" and "Environment".

Participants were then grouped according to personal preference to both motivate and create as productive of a discussion environment as was possible. Needless to say the participants passionately discussed and stood by the possible recommendations they had in mind.



After an hour and a half of discussion the participants proudly presented the recommendations to members of other groups in order to collect constructive feedback. The four groups were then given the time to prepare a short pitch that they consecutively presented to Réka and Jonathan, who gave both practical and theoretical tips and hints allowing the participants to gather a greater understanding of the reality on which the recommendations are based.

Having an evening to mull all the feedback and knowledge, they were given, over, the recommendations were ready to be finalised and shaped into the single sentences the morning after, with the possibility to give an additional explanation of the recommendation. Thus, after the process was concluded.

Recommendations

Participation in Civil Society is a topic which is hard to pin down to just one aspect. With so many constant changes to the structure of our different societies, the Youth needs to be able and enabled, to participate actively within them.

Thus of course the Youth must not wait for the world to change on its own. As a young generation it lays in our responsibility to shape the world and society of tomorrow.

Therefore we, the participants of the Y Vote Convention about Participation in Civil Society, propose the following recommendations:

1. Mental Health

The EU should create a framework that enables educational institutions to address mental health problems through counseling.

The EU should allocate funds to incentivise non-governmental and non-profit organisations to raise mental health awareness through non-formal education.

The EU should advocate for mental health support to be integrated in every national health system.

2. Education (Media Literacy)

We strongly encourage the European Union to create a Media Literacy funding scheme that will support educational institutions, media outlets, civil society organisations and other relevant parties' actions dealing with this issue on a European and/or national level.

Establishing the Media Literacy funding scheme would support educational institutions, media outlets, civil society organisations and other relevant parties' actions with media literacy professionals with a form of project based initiative. Module would consist of media literacy courses offered by already mentioned institutions, media outlets, civil society organisations to relevant instances with access to a wider range of the public. Funding would be given to the best project proposals. The scheme would support actions in the EU candidate countries.

3. Social Inclusion

We recommend that the European Union empowers local information offices to provide information on minorities for society in order to faster understanding and respect for human rights.

We suggest to include LGBTQ communities, immigrants and other minorities to focus on. Furthermore it would also be beneficial to create opportunities through these information offices to inform minorities about their human rights themselves.

4. Environment

We recommend the EU to support NGOs and EU institutions to share best practices, create exchanges and projects with non-EU countries, mostly affected by environmental issues.

A participants' view

"We signed up for this convention without a very clear image about what "civic participation" really is, and we can say that, once it is finalized, we have a much wider knowledge, not only of that topic but also of how to address the political sphere in a clear and effective way. It all became possible in less than a week in Düsseldorf. Definitely, this convention has been a good investment of time and a great opportunity to learn a lot.

Democracy is a word with a broad and confusing meaning. Sometimes, we assume it means just voting every four years. But it encompasses a lot more than that, for example, our right to write the petitions to the European Parliament, the representation of our politicians in the European Union, public consultations and our own power to shape our destiny and ensure the proper functioning of the European institutions through the European Ombudsman.



The fight for who holds the legislative initiative in the European Union is still a hot topic. However, in the meeting produced within the Convention between the European Commissioner of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, Tibor Navracsics and the member of the European Parliament, Sabine Verheyen, an excellent harmony between the two institutions was seen.

The convention began with an interesting dynamic where certain members of each group were responsible for creating stories through random Powerpoint karaoke images, related to the ability to improvise and public speaking.

After the development of presentation dynamics among the participants, we learned the importance of civil society. We are civil society, we are the future and we are going to decide the fate of the European Union, which is under the threat from the new political challenges. Democracy is being built every day through the actions of associations, projects on local, provincial, regional, national, European and international level, voluntary work, etc. But in order to ensure that our voice is going to be heard, we have to know the channels for that.

The activity of the Fishbowl Discussion was developed in an agile way and through an interesting debate that should lead to a consensus, through questions where we all shared our opinions, for example:

- The voting age should be lowered to 16 years.
- The age to buy alcohol should be lowered to 16 years.
- You can be a political representative at 18 years old.

The debate with European politicians was especially interesting. They highlighted that the European priority is to grant more funds to the Erasmus Plus program, although they stressed that the priority of national governments nowadays (and of the European Union itself) is not to centralize competences at European level.



Then, we spoke about the European Parliament campaign "This Time I'm voting" that seeks to encourage youth participation on European elections this May. We saw the good practices of different associations and how a simulation of the European Parliament has been built, as well as how it promoted the debate among the citizens about different topics, such as the European army or a Minister of Foreign Affairs of the EU.

Following this, we identified different problems of civil society through brainstorming; we learned to address politicians by drafting policy recommendations, in Mario's case, on social inclusion and on promoting access to information regarding minority rights and in Milica's on organization of mental health awareness campaign on the local level. The visit of European Parliament's member Arndt Kohn also took place during the convention and with him we had a general discussion on EU affairs. After that, we carry out the implementation of the recommendations and present them, in order to study their feasibility in a real context.

People from Serbia, Spain, Belarus, Germany, Hungary, Slovenia, Finland, The Netherlands or the United Kingdom shared different experiences and realities from their own countries during these days and confronted different civil societies.

To sum up, it has been an incredible experience that we have to thank Erasmus+, AEGEE-Düsseldorf and the Y Vote team."

Mario Villamor Nodal from Spain
Milica Živić from Serbia

Results

35

Participants

5

Days

14

Different nationalities

22

Years old on average

49%

is the average increase in knowledge
about the EU Institutions.

26%

Members of AEGEE

89%

Have had the chance to vote

97%

Of these people did vote

More than 95% of participants...

...(strongly) agree that participation is important and can change outcomes of
political decisions.

...(strongly) agree that the political institutions of the EU are important for
young people.

...(strongly) agree that participation is important and can change outcomes.

...say that the workshops can help increase ones participation.

...think that active participation of citizens is important or even mandatory

...would recommend a Y Vote Convention to a friend.

"I was pleasantly surprised with the way the Y Vote convention turned out. I felt that the participants were very much interested in the given topics. The atmosphere was welcoming and teamwork came naturally. Organizers tried their best in making us feel heard. I would gladly be a part of something similar in the future".

Elena Arsin from Serbia



"I had a great time at the Y Vote Convention, the atmosphere was very encouraging and positive during the event. All of the participants and organizers were friendly and supportive. The convention was very well organized, and the workshops were informative and interactive. It was a great experience and I'm really glad I participated"

Elena Mudja from Serbia

"The Y Vote Convention in Düsseldorf has been an incredible experience and has shown us how it is possible to be politically active in the European Union in a simple way. In addition, they have taught us how to approach politicians, write recommendations to the EU and all the mechanisms that citizens have to express their opinion in European institutions. All this has been possible thanks to the help of Erasmus+, which has 100% funded the project (accommodation, meals, and transport), AEGEE-Düsseldorf and Y Vote Team. Thank you so much!"

Daniel Cervera Martín from Spain

Y Vote

Y Vote is a Europe wide campaign designed to encourage young citizens to make informed choices in the European Parliament elections 2019. This will be reached by improving and developing the knowledge and skills of young people about the elections and European institutions. Y Vote aims at empowering and motivating young people to participate in society and become involved in democratic processes. These actions will tackle the current low understanding of and information on European institutions, mistrust and apathy and the low voter turnout, especially among young people. The project has previously been organised for the 2009 and 2014 European Parliament elections.

Y Vote is AEGEE-Europe project which is supported by various [partners](#), such as

- EDUOpinions
- The European Youth Forum (YFJ)
- Young European Federalists (JEF)
- Erasmus Student Network (ESN)
- European Movement International (EMI)
- This Time I'm Voting – The official campaign of the European Parliament
- The European Parliament
- POLIS 180
- #MEGACampaign by the European Civic Forum
- Eyes on Europe
- World Organisation of the Scout Movement
- EU40

www.yvote.eu

AEGEE-Europe

Founded in 1985, the European Students' Forum, "Association des Etats Généraux des Etudiants de l'Europe", is now one of the largest interdisciplinary student associations of the continent. AEGEE strives for a democratic, diverse and borderless Europe, which is socially, economically and politically integrated, and values the participation of young people in its construction and development. AEGEE empowers students and young people in Europe to take an active role in society. It creates a space for dialogue and learning opportunities as well as acts as their representative towards decision-makers. Moreover, AEGEE strengthens mutual understanding and brings Europe closer to young people.

www.aegee.org



The “How to Vote” app

The right information right at your fingertips! By answering two simple questions, this app tells you immediately how you can vote in the European Parliament elections. It is now available on any device - simply scan the QR code or visit www.howtovote.eu!



Pay our developers coffee!

Making an app and researching electoral laws takes time. While it's great when people put their free time in projects, we believe in fair payment. With **your** contribution, we can pay our developers, our research assistant, as well as costs for the server and licenses we need.

Head over to yvote.eu/crowdfunding, it really makes a difference!



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