

Citizen's Agenda - Youth 2005

01/08 - 07/08, Brandbjerg, DK

Preamble

We, as a group of young Europeans, are aware of the crises the EU is facing. Political, economic and social problems have been increasing for the last few years, which led to the rejection of the Constitutional Treaty by two member states. The present conflict provides us with an excellent opportunity to use the growing attention as a catalyst to a more active European citizenship. It is not only the responsibility of the EU authorities but of all Europeans to face these challenges.

We, as a multicultural team, are conscious of our differences and see them not as a weakness but as a strength. The discussions about neo-nationalism, European enlargement, participatory democracy and knowledge-based society made us understand how difficult it is to compromise among opinions fed by various cultural backgrounds. Our common visions helped us to bridge those differences and join our efforts together.

We, as fifty students from all over Europe, hope to serve as a role model for a future European Community which steps closer together but keeps its diversity.

We invite you to take the suggestions from our committee work into consideration.

Enlargement

The Committee on Enlargement has focused on three problems:

1. Future enlargements of Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, Ukraine and Turkey
2. Economy politics
3. Decision making process

Bulgaria and Romania

We are aware of the fact that the French and Dutch referendums have slowed down and created some scepticism towards the enlargement process, and we would like to continue negotiations and ensure that the accession will take place according to the agreed agenda because both countries have made a great economic and political progress since the democratisation in the beginnings of the 1990s.

Croatia

We acknowledged that Croatia has fulfilled almost all the economic criteria necessary to access the EU, and we call upon the European Union bodies to start negotiations with Croatia as soon as they fulfil the Copenhagen criteria, especially taking into account the fact that Croatia does not cooperate enough concerning the process of dealing with war crimes committed during the Balkan war.

Ukraine

The committee welcomed the Orange Revolution and the declaration of the Ukraine decision makers, wanting to strengthen the connections with the EU. We encourage the EU authorities to create a perspective of membership for the Ukraine in a distant future, should it continue the democratisation and the reform process.

Turkey

We are concerned about the violation of the human rights in Turkey as well as with the big cultural and religious disagreements.

We are also taking into account the large population Turkey has, in consequence of which a large flow of labour force may occur in other European countries. We call on EU bodies to recommend that work permit quotas are important during the first years of membership.

We urge the EU institutions to spend more on external border control and to speed up the setting up of the border agency.

We call upon all the member states to maintain the present contribution they make to the EU budget.

Neo-Nationalism

Right after two turn-downs of the European Constitution the European Union faces a general crisis. This crisis goes along with a major challenge that is called neo-nationalism.

In the Webster dictionary nationalism is explained as “a devotion to one's nation” or “excessive, narrow, or jingoist patriotism”. In general, nationalism is described as the attitude the members of a nation have when they care about their national identity, or as the actions that the members of a nation take when seeking to achieve some form of political sovereignty.

However, neo-nationalism can be a form of nationalism or the revival of old ideas. It is usually understood as something negative due to the problems it has caused in history. Nowadays, the opposite extreme is developing and leads to giving up national identity in favour of a European one. This is formed by the values that are common amongst all the citizens of the European Union. The aim of the European identity however is not to threaten the national one, as it rather complements the national identity than replaces it. This fear is responsible for the underdevelopment of the European identity. We need to keep in mind that the European identity can grow and become stronger only with the help of the diversity of national identities.

Nationalism also affects marginalized communities within European societies. Hostility between new and established communities finds its source in the fear of each other. This fear feeds on the low level of awareness which is obvious in issues of lifestyle in general. This fear of the different is enhanced by a more concrete fear of the economic future. All over Europe, an economic crisis is causing unemployment and poverty. Increasing unemployment has created a feeling of general economic insecurity, which enforces the success of nationalistic argumentation, which simplifies the problem and puts the blame on marginalized groups. Politicians should finally accept their responsibility and therefore explain the reasons for the economic difficulties.

Another impact of the aforementioned crisis on the coexistence of communities is the lack of money in public budgets. Unemployment especially tackles marginalized groups. Whilst integration takes place in the working environment, members of minority groups are much harder to integrate. Nevertheless, we believe that a society in which all groups are integrated to the furthest possible extent will suffer less in times of crisis and will be prepared to cope better with possible challenges.

The solutions to these problems are various. Initiatives launched both on national and local level would be helpful in order to bridge the gap between different communities, allowing them to understand the cultural differences. The European Union should also work on simplifying the EU documents and their analyses for the language to be closer to the citizens.

Competencies and Skills

Considering the lack of information as well as education provided for the citizens regarding the European Union, we face the problem of its non-presence in everyday-life, a lack of interest and hence of active participation among its inhabitants.

On an economic as well as a socio-cultural level this leaves us to face the challenge of raising the general awareness about the benefits of European integration in order to secure efficient transmission and exchange of skills and to diminish the fears it inspires in some citizens.

In order to encourage a European identity in the populations it is necessary to introduce the topic at an early stage during academic education. This should be proposed to the member states to become part of the national curricula. Where necessary, money should be provided for additional teacher-training concerning the respective subjects in question. To enhance the feeling of a European identity, Europe has to become more democratic. This would enable citizens to identify more strongly with it. We propose an increased number of referenda to be used concerning issues that will directly affect the lives of the citizens. Furthermore the possibility of common European ID-cards should be proposed to the national governments.

The mobility within Europe should be increased in order for working people to enrich their personal competencies and to contribute to the sharing of experiences and knowledge between countries. To enhance this mobility, the use of agencies such as “Euroforum” or “IRR” should be advertised more strongly. Furthermore the distribution of the “Europass” and the creation of networks between

companies could greatly contribute to international work experiences of workers coming from all educational backgrounds and sectors of work.

The combination of these actions will contribute to the development of a more united and stronger Union, in which people will feel more integrated and involved.

Participatory Democracy

Another problem is that Europeans mostly do not participate in the democracy they live in. However, it is vital that the European community is not only shaped by politicians but mainly by its citizens.

Sadly, there is a deep lack of understanding of what exactly the European Union is and what it does for its citizens. This is mainly because they feel that Brussels and the decision-levels are too far away from their everyday lives, but also because they lack contacts to people in other European countries.

Therefore they do not feel part of a real community where they can get involved and make a difference.

To address these problems, we believe that the European Union should give more of its citizens the opportunity to get together with other Europeans, as well as with elected politicians .

Furthermore, the media usually only focus on national issues and mostly bring only negative stories on the EU. The EU should therefore give the citizens the possibility to watch the decision-making process more closely e.g. by showing European Parliament sessions on TV.

There is also reluctance among European citizens to vote at European Parliament elections. One possibility to address this problem would be to link these elections to referendums on specific problems that concern all citizens. As a result, they would be more involved in the decision-making process.

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