

NEXT GENERATION EUROPE

*How the case for the EU can be re-made and re-energised.
New YouGov polling showing a pro-European majority
among Britain's young people, with responses and analysis
from Kira Hujju, Peter Kellner, Emma Reynolds MP,
Ulrich Storck, Ed Wallis and many others*



About the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung is a non-profit German political foundation committed to the advancement of public policy issues in the spirit of the basic values of social democracy through education, research, and international cooperation. The foundation, headquartered in Bonn and Berlin, was founded in 1925 and is named after Friedrich Ebert, Germany's first democratically elected president. Today, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung has six adult education centres and 13 regional offices throughout Germany, maintains branch offices in over 90 countries and carries out activities in more than 100 countries.

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
66 Great Russell Street
London WC1B 3BN
T: +44 (0) 20 7025 0990
info@feslondon.net

www.feslondon.org.uk

EDITORIAL

The EU was founded on a 'never again' spirit following the second world war, yet the arguments the first generation of European leaders made for closer integration resonate less and less as time goes by. A growing proportion of the electorate are too young to remember the fall of the Berlin Wall, let alone the despair of post-war Europe. For a new generation, the EU is a way of life rather than a political project.

This is a double-edged sword for pro-Europeans. New polling conducted by YouGov for the Fabian Society and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung shows that 18-to-34-year-olds are instinctively and culturally more pro-European than other groups having grown up with the benefits of cross-continental co-operation. Yet there is also a fear that this will not translate politically and the next generation will not take a stand for the EU in the increasingly anti-EU climate in Britain. The task for EU advocates is therefore to involve them and harden their soft support.

This policy report investigates how to do this, featuring a range of young British and non-British authors responding to different aspects of the polling. Kira Huju, for example, points to the different attitudes of Finnish and British young people towards the EU; Brhmie Balam explores the challenges and opportunities of free movement of labour; and Yiannis Baboulias considers the consequences of the eurozone crisis. Elsewhere, the Labour party's shadow Europe minister Emma Reynolds MP and Peter Kellner, president of YouGov, analyse the results of the poll and show how social democrats can make a positive case for Europe during a time of huge economic and social pressures for the young. The report concludes with two case studies which demonstrate the practical ways cross-continental co-operation can benefit young people's lives: The Youth Secure Streets Project and the European Youth Parliament.

CONTENTS

2	Generation why? <i>Ulrich Storck and Ed Wallis</i>
6	It's my economy, stupid <i>Peter Kellner</i>
8	The digital age of European politics <i>Emma Reynolds</i>
9	The bigger picture <i>Kira Huju</i>
10	Our Europe? <i>Yiannis Baboulias</i>
11	With arms outstretched <i>Pauline Gessant</i>
12	Politicise, personalise, regionalise <i>Johanna Uekermann, Judith Klose and Matthias Ecke</i>
14	Unemployment and immigration: a recipe for Euroscepticism? <i>Brhmie Balam</i>
16	CASE STUDY The Youth Secure Streets Project <i>Lydia Finnegan</i>
17	CASE STUDY The European Youth Parliament <i>Gillian O'Halloran</i>

**FABIAN
SOCIETY**

FABIAN SOCIETY
11 Dartmouth Street
London SW1H 9BN
020 7227 4900 (main)
020 7976 7153 (fax)

info@fabian-society.org.uk
www.fabians.org.uk

General Secretary,
Andrew Harrop
Deputy General Secretary,
Marcus Roberts

Report Editors, Sofie Jenkinson,
Ed Wallis
Printed by DG3, London E14 9TE
Designed by Soapbox,
www.soapbox.co.uk

Grateful acknowledgement is made to the office of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in London for the support of this publication

Like all publications of the Fabian Society, this report represents not the collective views of the Society, but only the views of the individual writers. The responsibility of the Society is limited to approving its publications as worthy of consideration within the labour movement.



© European Union 2012 – European Parliament

Generation why?

Our new polling shows there is a pro-European majority amongst Britain's next generation, yet this tends to manifest itself culturally rather than politically. *Ulrich Storck* and *Ed Wallis* explore how to turn Europe into a political cause for Britain's young people



*Ulrich Storck is
the Director of
FES London*



*Ed Wallis is
Head of
Editorial at the
Fabian Society*

THE EU, WE are constantly told, is in crisis: economically and politically. This era of crisis has hit the left particularly hard, with the economic turmoil – originally heralded as the opportunity for a ‘progressive moment’ which would tame the ravages of capitalism – morphing into a crisis of debt and fiscal imbalance. Electoral defeats for centre-left parties across the continent have ensued; even the recent optimism which greeted the election of Francois Hollande in France faded quickly as he struggles with record poll lows, a worsening economy and rising unemployment.

This presents a profound challenge for the pro-European left in the UK, which David Cameron’s pledge – bold or reckless, depending on where you stand – to hold an ‘in-out’ referendum on the EU if he wins the next election has made much more urgent.

How can the case for Europe be re-made and re-energised? Can Britain’s political relationship with Europe become more constructive?

A new YouGov poll, commissioned by the Fabian Society and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, suggests that one route towards changing the conversation on Europe is to focus on the fact there is a pro-European majority amongst Britain’s next generation. 18–34-year-olds have grown up with the benefits of cross-continental co-operation; yet this tends to manifest itself in a cultural cosmopolitanism rather than expressing itself politically. Our poll offers some clues on how advocates might harden this soft support.

There is a stark generational divide on the basic question of whether Britain should remain in the EU. Over half (62 per cent) of

voters aged under 35 said they would vote ‘yes’ to EU membership in a referendum. In contrast, among the over-60s, 66 per cent want to leave the EU.

Young people are often written off as apathetic and are rarely a target group for political strategists, due to their higher propensity to sit on their hands rather than actively participate in democratic decision-making. A recent *Guardian* study into the political attitudes of Britain’s young described “the desolate atomisation of what we might dub ‘generation self’”; turnout at the 2010 general election among 18–24-year-olds was 44 per cent, well below the national figure of 65 per cent. However, it is clear that a strong democratic spirit exists in young people, often operating outside traditional party political structures. This has stirred in opposition to the government’s austerity

If there was a referendum on whether or not Britain should remain a member of the European Union (EU), how would you vote?*

Would vote for Britain to remain a member of the European Union

Would vote for Britain to leave the European Union



* Excludes those who answered 'don't know' and 'would not vote'

Below is a list of specific areas. For each one do you think co-operating with other countries in the European Union has benefited Britain or whether Britain would have been better off acting alone?*

Cooperating has benefitted Britain

Britain would have been better off working alone

Tackling climate change



Fighting terrorism and international crime



Standards of workers' rights



Relations with countries outside the European Union

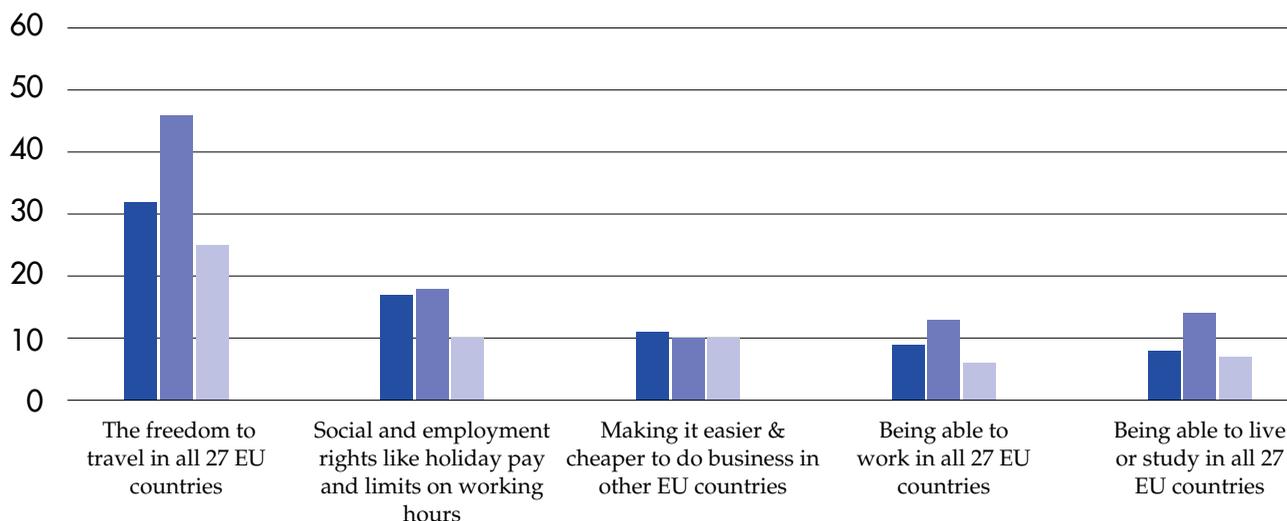


International trade and protection against unfair competition



** Excludes those who answered 'neither' and 'don't know'

Generally speaking, which, if any, of the following do you think MOST benefit you personally from Britain's membership of the European Union (EU)? Please select up to two.



programme through the likes of UK Uncut, been harnessed on specific issues by 38 Degrees, and been mobilised through the Occupy movement's powerful campaign against the inequitable and unsustainable nature of global capitalism.

So if young people are both broadly EU sympathetic and capable of being politically engaged, how can we turn Europe into a political cause? To discover what might resonate, as Peter Kellner outlines on page 6, we tested some of the big arguments that have been advanced in favour of the European Union since its formation, asking whether people found them convincing or unconvincing to see what resonates most with the new generation.

First, we found residual support across all age groups for Europe's foundational idea that European co-operation could win the peace: 41 per cent of people found it convincing that 'The EU has helped keep peace in western Europe since the second world war', compared to 25 per cent who found it unconvincing. Second, we tested Jacques Delors' idea of a social Europe, which was so crucial to shifting the mainstream British left away from a soft sceptic position to become EU enthusiasts in the 1980s: 'The EU has agreed common standards of workers' rights, consumer protection and played an important role in guaranteeing the social rights of individual citizens'. 40 per cent

found this convincing, with 26 per cent unconvincing. Here the generations clearly diverge, with under-35s in favour by 48 to 15 per cent and those over 60 years of age, 38 to 32 per cent against. The *Guardian's* study of young voters claimed they were shifting rightwards and that 'the left's defining value of solidarity is in considerably shorter supply among the young than the old'. This is strong evidence in the opposite direction.

In times of economic insecurity the pro-EU argument can't rely on grand narratives and unifying visions. Instead, it needs to spell out the practical benefits of the EU

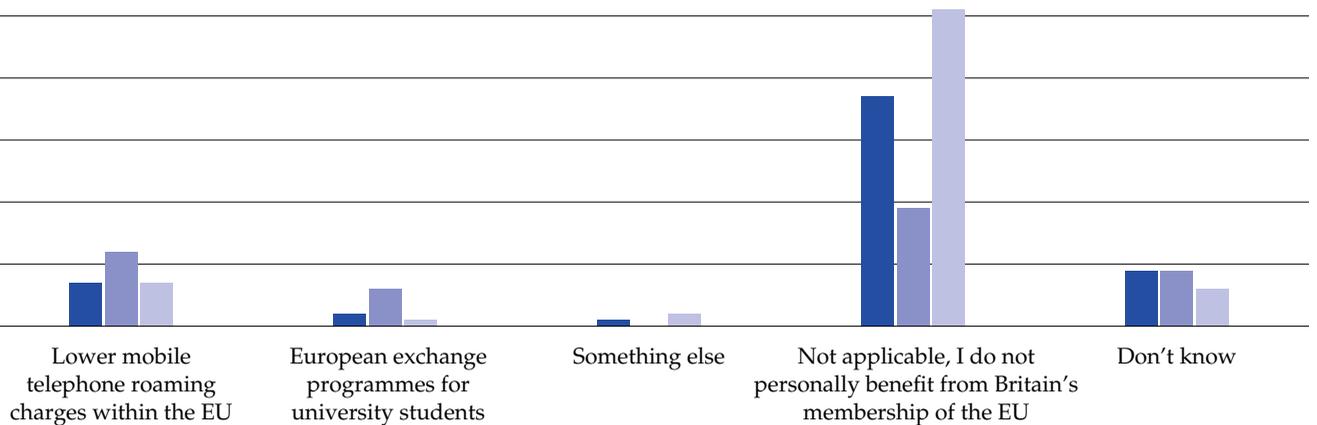
Perhaps understandably given the ongoing financial turbulence in the eurozone, economic arguments for co-operation found fewer takers, though the overall balance was still just about positive. 34 per cent were convinced that 'The European Union has helped free trade between EU

countries and has made the countries richer and more prosperous as a consequence', with 31 per cent unconvinced. But – perhaps surprisingly given the scale of youth unemployment and the crisis raising severe questions as to whether the European economy is capable of delivering long-term prosperity for young people – under-35s were much more supportive: 44–19 per cent in favour, compared to over-60s who were 43–29 per cent against.

However, by far the most resonant argument – across all ages but amongst the young in particular – was the freedom that Britain's partnership with Europe bestows on us. 60 per cent of all respondents were convinced by the argument that the European Union 'has given people the freedom to travel, work and live in other EU countries', with only 12 per cent unconvinced. This was even more pronounced for 18–34-year-olds (60 to 7 per cent) but still strong among the over-60s (61 to 16 per cent). This finding was borne out when we asked people to pick the areas where they felt they benefited the most, personally, from the EU, with freedom to travel by far the most popular with under-35s (46 per cent). The next most popular answer was social and employment rights with 18 per cent.

But it's not just the personal benefits – Britain's young seem to display a realism that their generation will have to live in

■ Total ■ 18–34 ■ Over-60s



a multipolar world of global powers. We asked whether, if Britain left the EU, it would be able to punch above its weight internationally or would end up isolated in a world of big power blocs like the US, EU and China. Under-35s thought by 40 to 34 per cent that Britain would become isolated, whereas over-60s felt by 47 to 29 per cent that Britain would be able to punch above its weight on its own. Under-35s were also more doubtful whether Britain would be able to have its cake and eat it too if it left the EU: they were more likely to agree that for Britain to get any EU benefits from the outside, Britain would have to pay into the budget and comply with regulations without having any say in their formulation (44 per cent); whereas over-60s tended to think Britain would be able to negotiate some of the benefits without the drawbacks of being full members (42 per cent).

However, the freedom of movement and migration from EU member states is frequently linked to job losses in British political debate, as Brhmie Balaram discusses on page 14. Not surprisingly therefore, by a margin of 60 to 25 per cent, all age groups said they would be happy for their ability to work in other countries to be restricted if it meant that other EU citizens could not come to Britain so easily. Although to a lesser extent, this sentiment was shared by under-35s (47 to 38 per cent). There is no

doubt that across all age groups, immigration is of great concern. Policy-makers need to get on top of this issue, both in policy terms but also politically, by recognising the strength of feeling it engenders. The Labour party is beginning to understand this, with recent interventions by Ed Miliband and shadow home secretary Yvette Cooper accepting Labour underestimated the impact of the free movement of labour on some native workers and proposing a range of measures – from minimum wage enforcement to making the benefit system more based around domestic contribution – to help make the European labour market feel less insecure.

This poll also shows how important it is that policy-makers don't disregard young people just because they don't turn up to vote as reliably as other age groups. If Britain does withdraw from the EU, future generations in Britain will bear the consequences. Their pro-European preferences should therefore be taken into account by policy-makers when making crucial decisions about Britain's future. Moreover, young people can become politically engaged; policy-makers should not write them off, but bestow their concerns and demands with the same importance and legitimacy as those of other age groups.

In times of economic insecurity the pro-EU argument can't rely on grand

narratives and unifying visions. Instead, it needs to spell out the practical benefits of the EU. This means addressing the insecurities of young people around job losses and immigration, whilst at the same time demonstrating what the EU brings to their day-to-day lives. For young people this is, as our poll shows, freedom to travel, work and study in the EU. Having never known anything different, it is important to highlight the costs of losing these benefits, which some young people may take for granted. This might be the way for campaigners to counter some of negative arguments advanced against the EU. In addition, advocates should point out the financial and non-financial consequences of exiting the EU – not in abstract, national level terms, but in ways that resonate with the detail of young people's lives. In doing so, pro-Europeans will find that, in young people, they have a strong constituency on their side in the forthcoming battle to preserve Britain's role at the heart of Europe. ■

For the full polling results visit www.fabians.org.uk/publications. All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 1,767 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 29th–30th November 2012. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).

It's *my* economy, stupid

While the older generations may look to Europe and find it wanting, the younger generation can clearly identify its positive impact on their lives. *Peter Kellner* takes a detailed look at the differences that matter in the YouGov polling



*Peter Kellner is President
of YouGov*

THE IN-HOUSE SLOGAN of Bill Clinton's 1992 election campaign is worth reviving. 21 years later and 3,000 miles away, "It's the economy, stupid" applies to the way young Britons think about Europe. If anything, the screw should be tightened further: "It's *my* economy, stupid".

Polls used to show a clear majority, usually around three-to-two in favour of Britain leaving the European Union. Recently, the gap has closed. But within that overall picture, a clear generation gap has emerged, with those under 35 consistently in favour of remaining in the EU and those over 60 consistently in favour of withdrawal.

Why has this generation gap opened up? YouGov set out to answer this question in a special survey for the Fabian Society and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

First, we tested a series of issues that affect Britain's relations with other countries. In each case we asked whether Britain would do better co-operating within the EU or acting alone. How the views of the under-35s compare with the over-60s is set out in Table 1.

The hierarchy is a familiar one: the case for co-operation is seen as strongest on

intrinsically international matters such as climate change, trade and terrorism, and weakest in relation to people who act at more specific locations: exercising workers' rights, running farms, working in the City of London and arriving as immigrants at our borders. But in every case, the under-35s are more likely than the over-60s to favour co-operation, while the over-60s are far more likely to prefer going it alone.

That said, even the under-35s tend to reject co-operation in three areas where the EU holds sway – farming (subject to the common agricultural policy), bank regulation (think of the row over limiting bankers' bonuses) and immigration (with the EU's freedom of movement rules, about to be extended to Romania and Bulgaria). To be sure, co-operation is seen as vital on climate change and terrorism; but, rightly or wrongly, these issues are marginal to most people's lives, even the under-35s.

So, what does sway people? The answer starts to emerge when we move from issues to arguments. We tested seven different statements that different people make in favour of Britain remaining in the EU. The results are in Table 2.

Freedom of travel comes top on both sides of the generation gap; indeed, the proportion saying the argument is convincing is much the same among the under-35s and the over-60s. At the other ends of the scale, it doesn't much matter how old you are; just one-in-three reckon that 'We are all Europeans together...' and need to recognise our common bonds.

So where are the generation gap differences that explains why younger adults are more pro-EU than their parents' generation? Two stand out: workers' rights and free trade. On both, the under-35s find the arguments convincing rather than unconvincing by more than two-to-one, while clear pluralities of the over-60s find the arguments unconvincing.

In short, the way to promote continued British membership of the EU is to stress its practical advantages. That's not to say we should ignore the benefits of almost seven decades of peace, or our common bonds as inhabitants of the same continent. Some people are inspired by these propositions. But hard economic reality matters more.

For many people, the point is that this reality is personal. It is not simply an ab-

TABLE 1

Below is a list of specific areas. For each one do you think co-operating with other countries in the European Union has benefited Britain or whether Britain would have been better off acting alone?	Co-operation better		Better alone	
	18-34	60+	18-34	60+
	%			
Tackling climate change	45	31	18	35
Fighting terrorism and international crime	46	48	20	33
International trade and protection against unfair competition	44	37	23	41
Standards of workers' rights	40	28	29	58
Relations with countries outside the European Union	36	26	33	56
Farming and agriculture	26	14	42	71
Regulating banks and financial institutions	20	17	47	64
Immigration	17	10	51	76

TABLE 2

How convincing or unconvincing do you find the following statements in favour of the European Union (EU)?	Very/fairly Convincing		Very/fairly unconvincing	
	18-34	60+	18-34	60+
	%			
It has given people the freedom to travel, work and live in other EU countries	60	61	7	16
The EU has agreed common standards of workers' rights, consumer protection and played an important role in guaranteeing the social rights of individual citizens	48	32	15	38
Co-operation between EU countries is the best way to tackle the big issues of our time, like climate change, the global financial crisis and international terrorism	49	41	18	30
The EU has helped keep peace in western Europe since the second world war	47	44	17	29
The EU gives individual countries greater bargaining power together in their global negotiations	45	32	18	36
The European Union has helped free trade between EU countries and has made the countries richer and more prosperous as a consequence	44	29	19	43
We are all Europeans together as much as we are British, Swedish, German or Spanish. It is important that these common bonds are recognised	32	33	35	37

stract notion involving national statistics. Perhaps the most telling pair of generation gap numbers in our survey came when we asked people to identify which features of EU membership benefited them personally. Not surprisingly, freedom of travel comes top, followed by such employment rights as working hours and holiday pay. But the really striking finding is that only

43 per cent of the over-60s could identify any advantages; the other 57 per cent said "none" (51 per cent) or "don't know" (6 per cent). The responses of the under-35s were very different: As many as 72 per cent could identify at least one practical advantage for them personally; only 28 per cent could not ("none": 19 per cent, "don't know": 9 per cent).

Half a century ago, the big argument for Europe coming together was to escape the shadow of war and to build a stable peace. Those days are now gone. The EU stands or falls according to its ability to improve people's daily lives. And whereas the over-60s' verdict on this is broadly negative, among the under-35s it is clearly positive. **F**



The digital age of European politics

There is a risk the EU will become overly introspective in the wake of the eurozone crisis. To retain and build on young people's support, it needs to remain outward-looking, writes *Emma Reynolds*

PRO-EUROPEANS SHOULD BE buoyed by findings of the Fabian Society/FES polling into attitudes to the EU, and the Labour party should be particularly encouraged.

According to the poll, young people are more likely to support Britain's membership of the EU than older age groups. They are also overwhelmingly supportive of some of the EU's founding key principles, such as the freedom to travel, work and live anywhere across the Union. Moreover, they believe that the UK is better equipped to tackle global challenges as a member of the EU.

These findings show that the supposed evils of Britain's EU membership – often emphasised by sections of the media and the Conservative party – are not how most young people in the UK see it. Although the eurozone crisis has reinforced existing Eurosceptic attitudes among some of the British public, this does not appear to have had a significant effect on young people's view of the EU.

As a result, polls like this one undermine the argument that Labour should simply seek to mimic the policy of the Conservatives and UKIP towards Europe. To do so would be a betrayal of young people, who clearly enjoy the benefits of EU membership and whose future will be determined by the decisions we take today. Instead we must identify the reasons why younger people are more pro-European, ask what we can do to solidify this support and look at the ways in which we should

seek to reform the EU so that it continues to best serve their needs.

One explanation for young people's support for the EU is their increased internationalism, which makes them more receptive to the principle of co-operation with other countries. Without doubt, increasing globalisation and the impact of the digital revolution have played a role in shaping these attitudes. It is therefore no surprise that young people, who have lived their lives exclusively in the digital era, are the most pro-European. Indeed, the gap today between the experience of a young person growing up and the experience their parents had growing up a generation ago is perhaps as great as at any time in history.

Young people clearly believe that the EU is one of the best tools the UK has for tackling global challenges

Today, young people are more likely to see policy challenges as extending beyond national borders and as a result see the EU as more important than older age groups. This is certainly supported by evidence from the poll which shows that young people clearly believe that the EU is one of the best tools the UK has for tackling global challenges such as climate change, terrorism and international trade.

But it is not enough to simply be in favour of the status quo or allow our pro-Europeanism to blind us to some of the weaknesses in the way the EU works today. We must be confident in asserting that we are on the right side of the argument in believing that Britain's future lies at the heart of an effective, progressive and reformed EU.

There is a clear danger that in the wake of the eurozone crisis and in the struggle to return it to stability, the EU will become overly inward-looking. Whilst restoring economic stability and prosperity must remain the short-term priority of the EU, it is clear that the EU must also focus on some of the pressing, external challenges facing Europe. Without doing so, one of the most influential factors in young people's support for the EU could be lost.

To be successful and attract greater public support, the EU must be outward-looking and wary of any retreat towards the supposed reassurance of protectionism.

Some commentators might argue that as people get older, they tend to move to the right politically and therefore become more Eurosceptic. The YouGov polling certainly finds the highest levels of Euroscepticism in the oldest age groups. However, the fundamental changes that have taken place in recent decades with regard to access to communications and information constitute a major generational shift. The digital era has dramatically modified the terms of debate and altered how young people view the world and their own country. Without doubt, the immediate inter-connectedness now available through social media has changed the way people communicate but also the way young people regard the challenges that we face.

These trends are deep rooted and so it would seem wrong to assume, as has been done in the past, that with age this group is likely to become more Eurosceptic. Perhaps the logic which applied to previous generations is no longer relevant.

Only time will tell if this is truly the case, but if the current age group do not become more Eurosceptic, it will have a significant bearing on the tone of public debate about Britain's future in the EU.

The political power of young people is often weakened because they tend to turn out to vote in fewer numbers. It is therefore important that Labour and the wider pro-European movement continue to engage younger age groups in the debate on the EU. Simply because they may not vote in large numbers is not an excuse to disregard what should be a key constituency for promoting Britain's membership of the EU.

In order to achieve this, we need to highlight the type of EU which young people see as being of benefit to the UK and to their lives. We must also continue to advocate a reformed, progressive EU that is outward-looking and capable of tackling global challenges.

Retaining and building on young people's support for Britain's membership of the EU will, in time, strongly benefit the pro-European case. **F**

Emma Reynolds MP is Shadow Europe Minister



The bigger picture

What the next generation needs, argues *Kira Huju*, is a reason to fight

THIS IS WHAT we are told: half a century ago, Europe tore itself apart as a clash of interests and ideologies ravaged the continent. Out of the ashes of this trauma, so the myth goes, emerged the European Union. Since 1945, the Union has been working to mend the bloody wounds of our collective conscience and to safeguard our peace and prosperity in the spirit of conciliation and compromise. Here is the paradox: it is this very absence of conflict and convictions that threatens European unity today. We are the generation without a cause.

As Chair of the Young European Movement London I have prepared myself for questions like 'What's in it for me?', by learning an exhausting refrain of figures on the EU's benefits. Yet I have tired of reciting that the European single market has increased the continent's overall GDP by 2.2 per cent, and nor would I want to hear such figures myself if I was still on my personal quest for a cause. I would walk right past such obsessive pragmatism. What we need is a European Union that grants our causeless generation an identity and a reason to fight.

Allow me to sketch out some contours of the grand European cause. The European Union exists today as a tool for us to take charge of globalised and supranational processes. It exists because somebody must pioneer action against climate change, top the charts in development aid and spearhead negotiations for an arms ban treaty. The European Union is valuable for the youth of today as an intermediary between the national and the global. We are cosmopolitan by virtue of being European. Yet the perceived pettiness of European bureaucracy leads many

to bypass this intermediary step in their heads. What we need is not more small print and figures, but a glance at the bigger picture. As products of a competitive society, we have been conditioned to strive to outdo our peers. What the European Union offers in this 'war of all against all' is an alternative approach – an approach that puts a premium on co-operation in the face of common challenges.

Young Britons have, without conscious consent, inherited a heroically obstinate island mentality

I have the dubious honour of chairing a pro-European youth organisation in a country in which the obsession with economic cost-benefit calculations verges on a public health issue. UKIP have turned anecdotal, out of context scandalisation of British spending on an ever-abstract Brussels into our generation's opium for the people. Young Britons have, without conscious consent, inherited a heroically obstinate island mentality. Even in the liberal corridors of London universities, students plan trips 'to Europe'. I am in the intrusive habit of asking them where they were thinking of travelling *from*, in that case.

Again, we need to ensure that the young are conscious of their ties with a broader community. Although a consoling 62 per cent of British youth would not vote to leave the Union, they do not quite seem to understand why: a tragic 19 per cent cannot name a single way in which membership benefits them, according to the Fabian/FES polling. This represents an embarrassing public relations disaster on the part of the Union. The youth, quite literally, have the world to gain from the EU: their freedom to study and work abroad has never been more grounded in reality, with the Erasmus programme having funded nearly 3 million cultural epiphanies since 1987. It is also us who pay the bill if international efforts on environmental protection, immigration, or financial regulation founder.

Perhaps the tragedy is a national one: not all countries breed offspring as self-contained as Britain. At the risk of



© European Parliament/Pietro Naj-Oleari

speaking for an entire generation of Finns, I dare claim that the Finnish youth has internalised the great cause to a larger extent. By the time I was let out of high school, I could lose my political temper in English, make fun of Merkel in German, inform myself about the rise of Sweden's far-right through Swedish news, and read Sarkozy's popularity ratings in French. I had sat an entire class on the politics of the EU – a class which virtually every student specialising in the social sciences was expected to complete in high school. Such a mindset is anathema to most Britons, but it is easier to devote oneself to a cause when one knows of its existence. Herein lies the key to a more mentally present Europe: our generation must be given the bigger picture.

Somewhat ironically, the EU already constitutes a great cause in Britain – British pro-Europeanism manifests all the characteristics of counterculture. That is what chairing a pro-European organisation here feels like: rebellion. This sense of nearly foolhardy determination needs to be rediscovered across Europe. Earlier generations grew up campaigning for peace or rising up against dictatorship. They each had their grand narrative to harbour. Why should our generation settle for anything less? **F**

Kira Huju is Chair of the Young European Movement London



Our Europe?

To build support for the EU, we need to make a better Europe writes
Yiannis Baboulias

IT'S A STRANGE time to be arguing for increased and consistent support for the grand European project, the EU. If anything, we risk sounding irrelevant or even worse, blinkered ideologues.

The latest country caught in the eurozone crisis – Cyprus – will have to impose a bank levy on deposits over €100,000 and the price looks likely to be as high as 30 per cent, a move that will destroy confidence in other crisis-hit countries. As austerity deepens, those countries increasingly walk the rope of fascism as extremist parties rise, and banks run amok.

For many affected by the crisis it seems like the EU is nothing more than a faceless, unaccountable body of bureaucrats, that works against all but a few chosen industries like banking.

Despite the financial mayhem taking place in the south and images of riots and long queues outside soup kitchens in the media – and while here in London, food banks have become a necessity for way more Britons than we feel comfortable admitting – this poll for the Fabian Society/FES shows that under-35s are, in their majority, positive towards the UK's future in the EU. How did this come about?

As someone who sits comfortably in the middle of that age group, I feel that what this generation has figured out is a simple truth that our parents haven't: we feel that the EU has been hijacked. Like many of the institutions initially founded to make life better for millions, the EU has been taken over by vested interests, turning what should be a hug in to a strangling embrace. But still we move around in it.

I am writing this from London, where I've lived, studied and worked for five years now. At times, I left for months. A full year at one point. But this has brought minimal

disruption in my life. The only bureaucracy this brought upon me came from bills and bank cards and not much else. Back in Athens I have (or used to have, pre-crisis) friends who had moved from Germany, France, Britain, you name it. And this is all too natural to us. We expect to be able to just cross borders, both literally and metaphorically, without much fuss. The idea of isolation, geographical or otherwise, is unsettling. Many of us, even without our direct knowledge, depend financially on the freedoms the EU provides us with. This is a millennial-specific mindset.

Young people must support policy change on a European level, as pro-austerity governments look likely to start toppling one after the other within the next few years

There is a common theme in the reactions you get from people in my age group when it comes to the EU and the possibility of our country (be it Britain or Greece) abandoning it and exiting. I would pin it down as a sense of dread. Millennials have barely had any experiences outside this context: we grew up with the idea that we could study, work and live anywhere in Europe. How did we come to the point where we're seriously debating the possibility of individual countries giving it up?

The main question is: do we want to leave the EU or do we want to leave *this* EU? Turning our backs on the current corporatocracy seems like a compelling argument, but where would that leave Britain, Greece, Cyprus or any other country that might decide to take the step first? The case has been made before that in a world of giants, we can't remain dwarves for much longer.

The problem is that for many people it often feels like that there is no real incentive for engaging with the EU. This leads down a dangerous path where the EU may slip away from our hands, to the hands of banks and lobbies. The support young Britons show for the EU could be a catalyst in the long term for a better, more accountable Europe. Reforming the EU will require us to stick with it and see it through.



© Julien Lagarde

Even disaffected Britons who see no benefit in the single market must realise that the EU was designed to be a safeguard for democracy and peace in Europe. Isolation is never the answer when this is the target. British involvement in the European commons that departs from the usual cherry-picking attitude the Tory leadership is trying to spin, could set the path for the UK to become a leader instead of an 'outsider'. And it could lead, within the decade, to the formation of a solid anti-austerity front inside the EU, after the Tories' likely defeat in 2015.

The British pro-EU youth has to fight a battle on two fronts. On the one side Labour, likely to win the 2015 election, needs to be pushed, through a build up of pressure, into adopting a daring and strong position in EU matters and forego the populist Tory spin. By doing this the UK could reclaim the leading role it lost in the last three years. And on the other hand, young people must support policy change on a European level, as pro-austerity governments look likely to start toppling one after the other within the next few years.

A daring leadership that will adopt this approach can be sure to find allies in those who want to reform the EU. ■

Yiannis Baboulias is a Greek investigative journalist writing on finance, politics and pop culture



With arms outstretched

With a year to go before the European elections, *Pauline Gessant* looks at the progress the European Union has made in opening its arms to its citizens

DESPITE THE BEST efforts of European politicians – and the foundational statement of the European Union treaty that “every citizen shall have the right to participate in the democratic life of the Union” – it’s still said that the EU suffers from a democratic deficit. If we are to move toward a new stage of representative democracy and generate greater legitimacy for the EU, we must develop the European political life. To do this, we need a real European political party system, true European elections and better participatory tools.

The introduction of real party democracy in Europe, including Europe-wide political programmes and candidates standing for election as representatives of European political parties, will make European political life more open and inclusive, as well as subject to greater transparency and public scrutiny. Such European political parties should run in European elections, presenting their visions and proposals on European issues and putting forward their candidates for the presidency of the future European commission. Such changes in the behaviour of European parties do not require treaty reform but will allow a wide discussion of European affairs and will force the European parties to present their positive vision of a European future that includes the needs and demands of the younger generation.

Only if MEPs and the president of the commission are elected on the basis of a clear European campaign and not particular national interest, will the European elections and the resulting European

parliament reflect the political choices expressed by the voters. The mobilisation of transnational parties would give more political significance to European parliamentary elections and also offer citizens the chance to become active at European levels by pushing forward their issues on the European agenda.

This participation of EU citizens through their representatives in the European parliament shouldn’t be neglected. In the past, the European parliament has acted in several areas of specific interest for young people (anti-counterfeiting trade agreement (ACTA) regulation, costs of roaming services) and shown that it can have a real impact on the decision-making process. And so, EU citizens can influence EU policies by lobbying candidates and members of the European parliament.

Transnational parties would give more political significance to European parliamentary elections

Nevertheless it’s dangerous to see the direct election of the European parliament as the only answer. Further mechanisms must be incorporated at a European level in order to meet the demands for democratic participation: obligatory consultation at all stages of policy formation, full rights to information, including the right to pose questions to the institutions, and rights to initiate policy suggestions and legislation.

Some European programmes such as ‘Europe for Citizens’ and ‘Youth in Action’ are devoted to active European citizenship and so should be better funded, through a different distribution of the budget and/or from an increase in the EU budget from taxes such as financial or carbon taxes, as they support a wide range of activities and organisations promoting active European citizenship.

Besides, the commission already provides several ways to participate in EU-wide debates, above all through its website, ‘Your voice in Europe’, which is an open door to the EC consultations. The consultation of the economic and social committee and the committee of regions and also the so-called civil society and interest groups (first and foremost the Youth Forum which represents 97 youth organi-

sations) represents a great opportunity for citizens to take part in the shaping of the EU legislation.

Direct participation should not, however, be limited to consultation. Participation is sometimes limited to inviting the public to respond to pre-established policy agendas, following the institutions’ objectives rather than engaging the citizens in a two-way conversation in which the public and institutions can work together to define their priorities.

That’s why the young people should seize the opportunity offered by the European Citizens’ Initiative (ECI) introduced by the Lisbon treaty. The ECI is one of the first supranational democratic tools in world history. It allows the EU’s one million citizens to submit any appropriate proposal on matters they consider a legal act of the Union is required. This innovation has even been noticed by *The New York Times*, which ran a headline “Europe Turns Ear Toward Voice of the People” in July 2010. The ECI opens up the possibility for citizens to become active in a novel way. This new popular right creates a direct link between citizens and the institutions, allowing citizens direct access to the decision-making process at EU level and offers the first transnational way for political agenda setting.

Through ECI, civil society can make European parties and institutions sit up and listen to important issues which are being ignored. The ECI can thus help to develop a European common public space and bridge the gap between the European Union and its citizens. Some of the current proposals through the ECI have been launched by young people, such as ‘Fraternity 2020’ which wants to enhance EU exchange programmes – like Erasmus or the European Voluntary Service (EVS) – or the ‘Single Communication Tariff Act’, which asks for one unique all-inclusive, monthly flat-rate communication tariff within the boundaries of the European Union.

2013 is the European Year of Citizens – a year dedicated to the rights of people in Europe. One year before the European elections, this provides a particularly timely opportunity to raise awareness about the possibilities of European democracy and foster new ways of participating in and contributing to EU policy making. **F**

Pauline Gessant is President of the Young European Federalists (JEF)



© Franz Richter

Politicise, personalise, regionalise

It's not lack of information that stops young people voting in European elections, but the absence of political alternatives say *Johanna Uekermann*, *Judith Klose* and *Matthias Ecke*



Johanna Uekermann is Deputy Chairman of the youth organisation of the Social Democratic Party of Germany – Jusos



Judith Klose is the International Secretary of the Jusos



Matthias Ecke is Deputy Chairman of the Jusos

ARE YOUNG PEOPLE eager to shape the future of Europe? If you look at the turnout of the recent European elections the answer is no. Only 29 per cent of people aged 24 or younger voted in European elections in 2009.

This isn't just a phenomenon particular to European elections: young people vote less often than their older fellow citizens for all kinds of elections. In Germany, national election turnout figures show that 80 per cent of the voters in the age group between 60 and 70 exercise their voting rights, while only roughly 60 per cent aged 25 and under do so. In Britain the voting turnout of young people is even lower. In 2010, only 44 per cent of voters between 18 and 24 took part in the general election. The portion of women in this age is yet smaller: 39 per cent.

But turnout in national elections is, in general, always higher than in European ones. In 2009 this applied to all countries and is becoming more severe. While 63 per cent of people voted in the first European elections 1979 only 43 per cent voted, on average, in 2009.

In light of these trends, one might expect young people to abstain disproportionately from voting in European elections. But this presumption does not stand up to close scrutiny: the age gap is in fact smaller in European elections, since the drop in turnout is relatively sharper among older voters.

Given these numbers, we see that the problem of young people abstaining is more or less derived from the general problem of neglect faced by the European parliament in its elections. But why do people ignore European elections so widely?

Some say it's because people don't know what's at stake. They don't grasp the importance of European elections. They don't know the influence the European Union has or how the decisions of the European parliament, in particular, affect their everyday lives. Legislation is undoubtedly Europeanised: around half of our national laws are shaped or changed by decisions in Brussels. However, people lack knowledge about the European parliament, and the way the European institutions work. In this view, what is necessary is a Europe-wide information campaign, more media coverage and a general increase in awareness for European issues in national debate.

We reject this analysis. We think that European elections not only suffer from a

lack of information, but from the absence of political alternatives. European elections are not controversial enough. Despite the power of the European parliament, major national policymakers still treat European elections as 'second order elections'. The only political controversies are national; they do not argue over the future development of the Union as such. How should we shape European social and economic policy? What is the EU's role in the world? What should our common asylum policy look like? On these questions, conflict is often barely perceptible; there are only nuanced differences, far away from the antagonistic narratives parties tend to tell during national election campaigns. The Party of European Socialists (PES) did not even present its own candidate for the president of the European commission in 2009. This message sounds like: 'Don't bother voting, there is no choice anyway...'

In times of financial crisis, austerity seemed the only political solution in Europe – no matter how it affects the poor and the young

More controversy is the way to get more participation. In the words of a resolution adopted during the recent Congress of Young European Socialists that means 'Being the alternative, acting towards it!' We suggest a threefold approach.

First, politicise! Let everyone know there is an alternative direction. Make the European election more political, show clear differences and escalate conflicts. Don't worry: cooperation within the parliament will still be possible even after a tough campaign.

Second, personalise! Present an alternative for the president of the commission. Make them connected to a pan-European campaign for an alternative Europe. Don't bother with nationalist sentiments. Present the candidate as a strong proponent of your respective political view.

Third, regionalise! Make local MEPs and candidates more visible and locally accountable. We question the notion of a cross-European list where any regional af-

filiation is lost. Maybe a personalised election system on the basis of proportional representation as in Germany could be an alternative. The current situation is not satisfactory: in most of the member states the country as a whole is the only constituency, so it is up to national parties how they set up their election list. We need a level playing field in the electoral law for the European election when it comes to election lists.

Jusos – the youth organisation of the German SPD – join a common European youth campaign, as part of the Young European Socialists, our European umbrella organisation. We all need a platform with common goals and themes that are important for all European young people; a platform that shows the political alternative in Europe and creates a high visibility among young voters. With our three pillars 'employment, democratic economy and inclusive democracy' all young socialists will focus on topics that are directly connected to the real lives of young people. We will show the European perspective in each case and the difference to the other parties. If we all work together and for specific goals we can set the media and political agenda. The European campaign also includes a call for young candidates. Young people need to identify with their elected representatives. Otherwise the gap between them and the political elite will grow. Young European Socialists will start a pre-campaign that says "We want young MEPs!"

Another example is the European 'Rise Up' campaign Jusos started in 2012. Together with 11 partner organisations especially from countries hit hard by the financial crisis like Spain and Italy we as young political activists called for a 'Europe of jobs, democracy and ecology'. In times of financial crisis, austerity seemed the only political solution in Europe – no matter how it affects the poor and the young. With 'Rise Up' we try to show a political alternative. The priority in Europe for us is the fight against unemployment, the preservation of a high level of welfare and the decrease of greenhouse gas emissions. Democracy and the will of European people must count more than decisions of the markets, rating agencies and finance.

Jusos shows the European public that Germany is not the same as Angela Merkel. With voting you can change politics and its effect on your life. **F**

Unemployment and immigration: a recipe for Euroscepticism?

With youth unemployment high, might young Brits become more susceptible to Euroscepticism, if pulling out of the EU is seen as the only way to regain control of our borders? *Brhmie Balaram* outlines the alternative policy responses



*Brhmie Balaram is a researcher at IPPR
@BrhmieB*

EARLIER THIS YEAR, David Cameron pledged to hold an ‘in-out referendum’ on Europe if the Conservatives win the election in 2015. This may appease an older generation of Tory voters who fear the UK has surrendered its sovereignty to Brussels, particularly over its borders, but Britain’s youth remain unconvinced an exit would be best for the nation.

As the Fabian/FES YouGov poll shows, there is a clear generational divide when it comes to the question of Europe, with young people much more likely to vote ‘yes’ to EU membership in a referendum.

Growing resentment over EU migration may in part explain why older respondents are nearly twice as likely to be Eurosceptics as their younger counterparts. Older people are also more sceptical about free movement, a central tenet of belonging to the EU. Another YouGov poll for *The Sunday Times* asked whether the British government should act to restrict the right of Bulgarian and Romanian citizens to come and live in the UK, even if it means breaking EU laws. On this question, an overwhelming three-quarters of young people between the ages of 18–24 disagreed, but only a third of people over the age of 60 felt similarly.

Free movement to live and work in another country is understood by young Brits to be a positive extension of membership to the EU, and is certainly a benefit more recognisable to individuals than free trade or collective bargaining in global negotiations. But it can also stoke fears about competition for jobs and undercutting of wages. The thinktank British Future has suggested that differences in people’s attitudes towards immigration reflect general economic insecurity, with particular groups such as the white working class and older people more likely to feel economically insecure and consequently concerned about immigration. With youth unemployment high (at about 21 per cent for those aged 16–24), the concern now is that young Brits might become more susceptible to anti-immigrant sentiment and Euroscepticism, if pulling out of the EU is seen as the only way to regain control of our borders.

The tide of young optimism about the EU does appear to be faltering. When polled, almost half (47 per cent) of 18–34-year-olds said they would be happy for their ability to work in other countries to be restricted if it meant that other EU citizens could not come to Britain so easily. This raises the question

of whether these young people would be justified in making such a compromise.

The impact of European immigration on youth unemployment in the UK has been hotly debated since the number of Poles migrating to the UK in 2004 vastly exceeded estimates. The likes of MigrationWatch have inferred that a correlation between rising immigration and youth unemployment is “more than a coincidence.” There is speculation that eastern Europeans are actually causing displacement of young Brits in the labour market.

The government should respect that young people are committed to a relationship with the EU

There is no evidence to support this claim – reduced immigration would do little to help young unemployed people find work (and indeed might harm their chances by limiting growth still further). However, the presence of high levels of youth unemployment alongside high levels of relatively-unskilled migration from Europe does suggest that something is going wrong in the UK labour market. Youth unemployment in the UK is more likely to be explained by a changing focus of back-to-work support in the unemployment benefits system, an increasingly difficult transition from education to work, and ‘credentialism’ (employers requiring higher qualifications than necessary to screen for successful candidates) than it is by immigration. Furthermore, if we were to assume that eastern European immigration affected the employment prospects of young British workers, we would be hard pressed to account for the steep rises in youth unemployment in other ‘old’ EU countries, such as Spain and Greece, which have not experienced very high levels of migration from eastern Europe, as well as the converse in Germany – a country with relatively low levels of youth unemployment alongside high migration from Poland and other countries.

The truth is youth unemployment isn’t confined to the UK, but is an EU-wide problem. In certain countries, such as Spain and Italy, free movement to work elsewhere on the continent has alleviated some of the

pressure in markets which are, at present, particularly unkind to young people. With the eurozone crisis still barely held at bay, it can be expected that young people will continue to face higher rates of labour market turnover and may be forced to spend time moving between jobs before they can settle into a stable career. Rather than resort to closing borders – which might exacerbate the problem by stifling growth and job creation – there are other labour market interventions that governments at both a national and EU-level can pursue.

On the home front, Labour recently announced that one of its priorities will be enforcing the national minimum wage. Not only will this prevent employers from exploiting vulnerable migrants, but it will help to maintain a level of fairness between migrants and natives. Considering that there hasn’t been a single prosecution of employers paying below the minimum wage for the last two years, it seems apparent that government should be doing more on this issue.

At an EU-level, common standards on workers’ rights could be expanded to encompass provisions which regulate the hyper-flexibility of the labour market. In addition to the existing laws on holiday pay and limitations to working hours that have served British people well, the EU could do more to rein in exploitative practices, such as the use of zero-hour contracts. The precariousness of work is more acute for young people on zero-hour contracts because while they are expected to be available to work, they aren’t guaranteed any hours. This may explain in part why migrants are willing to accept jobs that young natives aren’t. Employers should instead be encouraged to offer steadier work, even if part time and/or temporary, if it means young people can feel more secure within their job.

Euroscepticism might be seen by politicians as an easy way to win over UKIP supporters and reassure some older voters in particular. But the perspective of young Brits also matters here, as they will be the ones dealing with the long-term consequences of decisions made in the coming years about the UK’s membership of the EU. The government should respect that young people are committed to a relationship with the EU, and should seek to strengthen this commitment through European co-operation that works in their best interests rather than undermining it by scaremongering about immigration. ■



CASE STUDY

The Youth Secure Streets Project

Transnational and European social projects done by bodies like Inclusion are not just an academic exercise. By learning from each other we may be able to offer some answers to severe social problems affecting all member states, writes *Lydia Finnegan*

WORKING ON EUROPEAN funded projects, and transnational work in particular, offers an opportunity to step back and take a different view of issues and how to tackle them. These projects are more flexible than mainstream funding can generally be and offer opportunities to try new things or do things in a different way. The transnational element encourages the cross-fertilisation of ideas and good practice.

Inclusion across borders

The Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion (Inclusion) is a not for profit organisation working to promote social justice and tackle disadvantage. A significant number of Inclusion's projects are European collaborations, which seek to test new social policy interventions to help the most disadvantaged. Inclusion runs a transnational network of organisations called the European Offender Employment Forum, which works in the offender employment field and has led or participated in transnational partnerships for many years.

The European commission proposes overall strategies, policy priorities, and the overall budget for the EU approximately every seven years – this is happening now and the UK is negotiating hard to limit the size of the budget. Each member state receives and administers

a substantial proportion of its allocation domestically. Some is retained by the commission to address shared priorities. This forms part of annual programmes of work that public bodies or not for profit organisations can bid for in partnership with other organisations in the EU.

The Youth Secure Streets Project (YUS)

Inclusion and the Municipality of Cordoba in Spain were approached by Progetti Sociali, a not for profit social enterprise in Italy, to participate in an anti-violence project. It was part of a programme run by the Justice Directorate at the commission called 'Daphne', the overall aim of which is to prevent and combat violence against children and women.

Informed by an initial evidence review of best practice in tackling youth violence, there were two main elements to the project. The first was the establishment of a task force of local residents and interested organisations to address local concerns and to develop a strategy for addressing them. The second was working with local young people in developing an anti-violence campaign for their peers. Inclusion worked with Westminster city council and the campaign became integrated into a wider co-ordinated strategy the council were already working on to tackle youth violence. Youth violence in Pescara and Cordoba is a relatively new phenomenon on an altogether different scale. The three projects, however, offered a broad set of circumstances – inner-city, urban and rural – in which to engage local disadvantaged youth.

The UK arm of the project saw Inclusion staff working with a group of young people living on housing estates in Westminster, mainly in the south of the borough. Some had very challenging behaviours; others did not. The unifying issue was that they all lived in parts of the borough with relatively high levels of social deprivation. They were given the opportunity to learn new skills through sessions with graphic designers, communications professionals, a film production team and an audio production company, and to grow in confidence from socialising with new people and making new friends. The products were a range of materials spreading the anti violence message, including a website

offering advice to young people on moving away from gangs.

Using the design work of the young people with the support of the council, leaflets were produced offering advice to parents on how to spot the signs of gang involvement and a separate leaflet for professionals to show local services to which at risk young people can be referred. The young people appeared on two radio stations, Avenues FM and Rezz FM talking about their campaign and one had an interview with BBC London. For all their hard work, the young people were afforded a number of recreational opportunities they might not otherwise have, including an activities weekend in the countryside.

As the project developed, although the cultural and social circumstances differed greatly across the three European cities, the activities and issues arising were very similar. Young people did engage enthusiastically in the campaign, local people – including local authorities – did commit to developing a local strategy.

The added value of the transnational dimension

The project fulfilled its specific tasks but its impact was much broader than that. Between us we have now established a body of practice in this field which can be used by any organisation in any member state. Our shared experiences offer help to organisations working in different countries and different social and economic circumstances. Final reports and recommendations for all Daphne projects are available on the Daphne website and will be referred to over time as practice is developed in this particular field. Strategically, the Justice Directorate uses these experiences to help shape its policy priorities and programme design.

The relevance and importance of this type of work was brought home to us mid-way through this project when a 16 year old, who lived on the estate where we were working, was stabbed to death. The work that we do on these projects is not simply an academic exercise. By learning from each other we may be able to offer some answers to severe social problems affecting all member states. **F**

Lydia Finnegan is International Research and Policy Adviser at Inclusion



CASE STUDY

The European Youth Parliament

Former European Youth Parliament President *Gillian O'Halloran* looks at how it and other youth organisations can help young people feel capable and comfortable speaking their minds

LARGELY UNINTERESTED IN and oblivious to politics, the youth of today are viewed as an apathetic and thankless bunch. It is only when negotiations have broken down, or seem impossible in the first instance, that young people appear to act: democracy in the Arab states and gun control in the US are causes that have recently gathered mass crowds. But although many wait until boiling point, there are also youth initiatives providing platforms on which young people can express opinions and discuss ideas.

The European Youth Parliament (EYP) is one such body that has been promoting political awareness and cross-cultural understanding for more than 25 years. As a non-partisan and independent educational project that is tailored specifically to the needs of the young European citizen, the EYP encourages independent thinking and socio-political initiative in young people and facilitates the learning of crucial social and professional skills.

What are the European Youth Parliament's core objectives?

The EYP provides an excellent platform for those that know about it and choose to get involved. It seems understandable that people who may already have exposure via school and family ties to politics, would access such an idea-sharing platform. It therefore remains of great importance to expand this pool to

include young people that may not yet care about politics, that do not feel that it affects them nor believe that they can have an influence.

Since I joined the EYP eight years ago, inclusivity has become one of the organisation's core objectives. Costs are brought down to a minimum and often completely subsidised; EYP alumni travel to schools; and conferences are hosted in the local language to include and encourage more people to take part, without the pressure of French/English linguistic ability (the EYP's working languages). The whole point of the project is to get people involved; to make young people across Europe feel that there is a facility in which they can share opinions and ideas, in which they can challenge and be challenged, with which they can better understand their neighbours, who ultimately are very similar and often like minded. Crucially, by integrating more groups in society at youth level, we exponentially increase the probability of acquiring greater and more balanced representations in the future of national politics.

These organisations often look to expand their reach and encourage youth who may otherwise be unaware of such platforms and/or less likely to participate in them. But changing the perceptions of whole sectors of society is a mammoth task and requires co-operation with schools, which often battle for sufficient contact time for curriculum education, let alone extra curricular endeavours. While we continue to brainstorm how best to tackle this challenge and attract new attention, word of mouth still seems most effective to share the enthusiasm, as was the case with me.

What can the European Youth Parliament do for young people?

The EYP aims for consensus-based decision-making. To continually reach consensus and try to better understand others' perspectives and explain one's own more accurately is an important skill, which invites creativity and concentration as well as compromise. Interestingly, it forces delegates to listen to what others have to say and indeed to justify their own proposals with facts. You do not need to be pro-Europe to enjoy and participate in this platform,

and that in fact is probably much more beneficial to have a devil's advocate to ensure discussions are grounded in realistic and genuinely implementable ideas. This exchange is probably one of the most valuable benefits that the EYP and similar organisations offer. From a personal point of view, it was, and still remains, fascinating to hear the completely contrasting viewpoints that different delegates hold and, how richly culture and upbringing can shape opinion.

What are the real implications of all this youth participation at the societal level?

Well, imagine living in a country where all citizens felt capable of and compelled to engage in the decisions that shaped their society, where people knew how best to address the apparent failings of their predecessors and the mechanisms of how to rectify such mistakes. Imagine if all tiers of society were equally represented politically, if those that needed a voice had ample support, encouragement and know-how in representing their needs and obtaining satisfactory justice. We don't live in that society, and realistically we never will. Yet the knowledge that there is a growing number of interested youths who will evolve into conscientious voters (and possibly leaders) means that injustices like those we are so familiar with today may diminish.

Being apolitical, the EYP asks participants to speak for themselves, to represent their own views without a political agenda. It has made me and my contemporaries feel that we can access and influence national and international political institutions with hard work and little resistance. No matter how the EYP or any other organisation chooses to do so, it is vital that young people feel capable and comfortable speaking their minds and are aware that there are welcoming platforms from which to do so. There remains however a worrying majority of young people that do not know about or care to engage in political activity; the EYP continues to play its part in changing that. **F**

Gillian O'Halloran is the former President of the European Youth Parliament

