

Young European Council: Giving a Voice to Young Europeans

Over four days, passionate future leaders gathered together in Brussels to negotiate practical measures to address the transition from education to employment, sustainable development in cities and the digital revolution, exchanging with policymakers from the European institutions and think tank experts.

The *Young European Council* (YEC) gathered together in Brussels 70 students and young professionals from more than 15 countries from October 20-23 2014 to discuss, negotiate and learn from each other. Focusing on three core themes of the transition from education to employment, digital revolution and sustainable development in cities they met with experts and decision makers from the European Commission, think-tanks and other institutions to exchange views and propose concrete recommendations. "Future European decision makers should have a strong voice...This is why Young European Leadership (YEL) exists...We help you speak up, we give you that strong voice" explained Tillmann Heidelk, President of YEL, organizer of the YEC, during the opening ceremony at the Council of the European Union.

Practical solutions to major challenges facing Europe: Young European Council Conclusions

The YEC delegates gave innovative and fresh solutions in response to three key challenges in Europe in order to make "Europe 'the place to be' for youth for today and tomorrow" as Michel Lebrun, President of the EU Committee of the Regions articulated at the opening ceremony. We need "a continent that creates new jobs, where future generations may live in a safe climate and clean environment, with a high quality of life". The main recommendations of the three YEC Committees encompass the following:

1) *Education to Employment: How to reduce the gap between education and the labour market?*

- Schools need to be more responsive to a rapidly changing labour market, in particular by equipping students with digital, entrepreneurial and intercultural skills. In turn they need greater flexibility to adapt courses of study to meet future professionals' needs
- Practical training should be integrated into the curriculum, more initiatives to enhance the implementation of the Europe 2020 Quality Framework for Traineeships should be supported and procedures to create start-ups should be simplified
- The skills mismatch should be addressed at the EU level by promoting mobility, building the capacity of employment agencies and recognizing skills acquired through informal education

2) *Digital Revolution and Technologies: What are the opportunities for e-government?*

- The need to ensure citizens are protected in their digital life by introducing mandatory classes on digital security, online rights and ethics in schools, using in citizen participation mechanisms to crowdsource appropriate solutions to issues of trust and security online
- The lack of trust in the EU should be addressed through the adoption of Open Data access on a single platform comprising easily searchable database of official documents and accessible summaries of complex legal documents
- The imperative for the EU to improve e-government systems by creating a unified portal for communicating with and providing services to citizens, including an online petition system to be integrated into legislative process of national and European parliaments

3) *Sustainable Development in Cities: What is the role of sustainable cities in meeting Europe 2020 targets?*

- To tackle air pollution, there should be incentives for citizens to use cleaner modes of transport and for private sector transport providers to adopt more environmentally friendly approaches
- Local authorities should raise awareness of the socio-economic and environmental benefits of greater energy efficiency in buildings, and lead by example with green procurement initiatives
- Cities should promote peri-urban agriculture to reduce food transport and storage pollution, emphasizing the benefits of local food production, and reduce waste by promoting the circular use of food and water resources through educational programmes and public-private initiatives

Exchanging with Europe's Policy and Business Actors

The YEC concluded with a closing ceremony, where the YEC delegates discussed their recommendations with leaders from business, government and civil society. European Commissioner for Climate Action Connie Hedegaard gave them insights into Europe 2020 objectives, as well as the 2030 objectives being finalized at the time. Cheryl D. Miller, Executive Director of the Digital Leadership Institute commented on the astuteness of the Education to Employment panel's analysis and gave insights from her own work, such as the recently launched European Coding Initiative. Matt Dann, Secretary General of think tank Bruegel, agreed with the importance of the digital topic for government, in an age where 'Twitter or Facebook is more valuable than a vote exercised once every few years'. He urged delegates not to wait for governments to act on their suggestions, but to go ahead and do it themselves.

On Wednesday 22nd October, delegates were able to discuss in a more informal setting at the **Eat&Meet** event. Around the intimacy of the dinner table, distinguished guests including Dr Carl-Christian Buhr, member of cabinet for the Digital Agenda, Ilias Iakovidis, Deputy Head of the ICT for Health Unit at the Commission and Valérie Kinoo, Co-Founder of the Digital Leadership Institute, could engage in a frank and open discussion with delegates. One delegate commented, 'I enjoyed the Eat&Meet dinner because it was a concrete opportunity to speak face to face with EU representatives'.

For some delegates, the YEC renewed their resolve to play an active role in issues shaping their generation: 'Citizens have to be heard, even through their digital voices. They can be the engines of real change because they can think globally and act locally in their member states. It's what I want to do, starting today', commented Carlotta Missaglia, YEC Delegate 2014.

The inspiration behind such convictions and behind the YEC itself was warmly supported by Michel Lebrun, President of the EU Committee of the Regions: 'The involvement of young people in European politics is essential, because policies are made for today but above all for tomorrow. The Young European Council is an excellent initiative because it confronts young people with their responsibilities'.



Source: Council of the EU / Young European Council delegates at the Council of the EU for the opening ceremony

About Young European Leadership

Young European Leadership (YEL) is an international non-profit organization (AISBL) headquartered in Brussels, Belgium. YEL's mission is to foster proactive engagement of young Europeans in their communities by equipping them with skills and knowledge and connecting them with their peers, as well as experts and decision makers. By giving young people a strong voice and empowering them to act, YEL's aim is to enable young people to take responsibility in tackling the major challenges of their generation.

Contact

Ludivine Félix, Communications Director
Simona Falanga, Media Manager
Diana Carter, Secretary General

ludivine.felix@younglead.eu
simona.falanga@younglead.eu
diana.carter@younglead.eu