

## **The European Youth Parliament: 20 years of educating political participation**

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### **History and Overview**

The European Youth Parliament (EYP) was founded 1987 in France and represents a unique forum designed to actively engage young people as well as in shaping the future of society and in fostering their own political participation.

The EYP represents a non-partisan and independent educational project which is tailored entirely to the needs of the young European citizen.

The EYP encourages independent thinking and socio-political initiative of young people and facilitates the learning of crucial social and professional skills. Since its inauguration, tens of thousands of young people have taken part in regional, national and international sessions, have built up friendship and international contacts across and beyond frontiers. It has thus made a vital contribution towards uniting Europe.

Today the EYP is one of the largest European platforms for political debate, intercultural encounters, political educational work and the exchange of ideas among young people in Europe. The EYP consists of a network of 32 European associations and organisations in which thousands of young people are active in an honorary capacity. After the withdrawal of the founder in 2004, the 32 national organisations have mandated the Heinz-Schwarzkopf-Foundation in November 2004 with the management of the new international umbrella organisation of the EYP.

### **Aims and Objectives:**

The aims of the European Youth Parliament are to:

- Raise awareness of young people with regard to European issues, encourage active European citizenship and motivate students to get engaged in European politics.
- Promote international understanding, create a framework for intercultural dialogue and support the diversity of ideas and practices.
- Contribute to the development of the own personality of European youth.

- Provide a forum in which young people of Europe can express their own opinions, without diverting to a role play.

### Activities:

With more than 50 events in the 32 national organisations, the EYP reaches well over 20,000 young people each year. Three major International Sessions also take place every year. On each of these occasions the European Youth Parliament brings together 300 young people from 32 countries in alternating European cities.

### What happens at the International Sessions of the European Youth Parliament?

The International Sessions last for 8 working days. The participants of the Session (delegates) experience different types of activities throughout the meeting with special focus on specific aspects of parliamentary work: Teambuilding, Committee Work, General Assembly and a cultural programme.

#### ❶ Teambuilding

The participants are divided in 15 international teams of 12 to 15 persons called “committees”. At Teambuilding, the committees perform different outdoor and indoor activities and have to find solutions to diverse problems. The aim is to form united committees based on mutual respect and bearing a solid group sense. The Teambuilding process prepares the delegates for a fruitful interaction in the following Committee Work and in the General Assembly.

#### ❷ Committee Work

After two days of Teambuilding, the participants start the Committee Work in the above mentioned international teams. The participants of each committee discuss their topic in English and French. The objective is the drafting of a common resolution on the respective topic. The committee topics are always linked to current European issues and developments. Often the International Sessions additionally have a session theme (i.e. Human rights violations in Europe’s past and present (International Session in Kyiv). Topics of past sessions included:

*‘Xenophobia is a shameful face of Europe and a serious problem in all parts of Europe today.’ (Thomas Hammarberg, Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, December 2006)*

Cultivating integration in Europe in the wake of rising immigration: which model for a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society in a Europe confronted by racism, xenophobia and intolerance?

*‘This enables the European Union, as a whole, to take on responsibility, and we want to take on responsibility for the Middle East process’ (Angela Merkel, German Federal Chancellor, January 2007)*

Iran, Iraq, Israel: is it time for the EU to get more engaged in the Middle East and what role can the EU play to favour stabilisation and peace in the region?

*'There is a clear correlation between climate change objectives, security of energy supply and competitiveness.'* (Andris Piebalgs, European Commissioner for Energy, January 2007)

Facing rising oil and gas prices, increasing energy dependency and the emergence of global warming: in developing a common European energy policy, how can the EU best achieve energy security?

All committees are moderated by an experienced chairperson who guides the delegates through the decision-making process up to the final drafting of the resolution. The work of the committee is therefore to analyse a given topic first, then discuss it always considering the different points of view, hear an expert on it, find a commonly accepted solution for it, draft a resolution and finally present and debate it during the General Assembly. This is a further an intense opportunity for intercultural learning, communication and learning about diversity.

### ③ General Assembly

When the resolutions are drafted, all delegates come together in a General Assembly. Each committee presents and defends its motion for a resolution, which is then debated in the Assembly following the parliamentary procedures of open debate. The parliamentary procedure used is the following:

- Presentation of the resolution
- Defence Speech
- Attack Speech
- Plenary debate
- Résumé
- Vote

In an open debate the delegates experience democracy and intercultural education through the plenary work. After the Session the resolutions are sent to key decision makers and Members of the European Parliament, the European Commission, the Council of Europe and other supranational bodies and institutions such as the UNESCO and the European Youth Forum.

### ④ Special cultural programme (Eurovillage, Euroconcert and socialising events)

For the *Eurovillage*, the country delegations bring food and drinks distinctive of their country and present it to the other participants in a marketplace atmosphere. The delegations also give a short presentation of a national dance or a traditional song.

*Euroconcert* is another cultural event at which talented delegates perform music. Additional informal social gatherings during the evenings provide many opportunities for the delegates to know each other better on a more personal level. They develop friendships, regardless of differences in cultural or social background.

### **What effect does this programme have – what are the benefits for the participants?**

- a. Participation: The International Sessions encourage young people to participate in the process of the European unification and the democratic life of Europe. More precisely, the International Sessions raise young people's awareness for European issues and the

policies of the European Union, encourage them to become active citizens at the local, national and European level, widen their visions and opinions on national and European politics and policies – and consequently develop young people’s sense of being an integral part of the European Union.

- b. Information: The International Sessions enable the young participants to inform and acquaint themselves with the European Union, its institutions and current matters of concern. The European Youth Parliament explicitly emphasises its aim of promoting the EU’s fundamental values among the youth, specifically respect for human dignity, equality, respect for human rights, tolerance and non-discrimination.
- c. Young volunteers: The EYP is a network of organisations whose structure is essentially based on the voluntary work of high school and university students. In this way, the International Sessions offer young people the opportunity to express their personal commitment through voluntary activities across European borders and cultivate solidarity between all European citizens.
- d. Improvement of the knowledge about the opinions and needs of young Europeans: By making participant’s ideas and opinions politically visible, the International Sessions provide European political institutions and decision-makers with a better understanding and knowledge of young people and their concerns, thus promoting the structured dialogue between European policymakers and young people.
- e. Education and training for the benefit of the youth: Beyond its International Sessions, the EYP offers participants the opportunity to get engaged in their respective national committees, in this way taking part in around 50 activities each year and for years. Thus, the youngsters continue to be active participants of civil society and continue to implement what they have learned during the International Sessions (knowledge on European affairs, intercultural dialogue, politics, one or two foreign languages, etc.).
- f. Personal development: Thanks to its activities, particularly its International Sessions, the EYP allows the young participants to acquire long-term competences that will enhance their future career chances, such as communication and participation skills, teamwork, multitasking, foreign languages and being at ease in a multicultural environment.
- g. Mobilising youth against racism and xenophobia: The International Sessions strongly promote intercultural understanding by favouring intercultural dialogue, supporting the active fight against discrimination, in particular against racism and xenophobia as well as promoting the multicultural diversity of the European society and thereby contribute to the peaceful development of Europe in the future.
- h. Debate on the future of Europe: The International Sessions aim at encouraging the youths to become aware of their role in the European construction process and to debate and shape Europe’s future.

### **Evaluation and visible effects**

<p>The evaluation of three International Sessions of the European Youth Parliament in 2006 shows that 79% of the participants raised their awareness of European issues, 84% felt encouraged to increase their active democratic citizenship, 93% experienced and appreciated</p>
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intercultural dialogue and 86% developed and improved their personal skills and competences.

These results show that the European Youth Parliament prepares the young Europeans in the age of 16 to 19 for active political participation. The young Europeans make their first steps in the political environment, learn about debating and develop own suggestions for current issues on the European agenda.

Also, a number of former EYP participants have become active in politics today. Amongst others, the following persons are former EYP participants:

- ⇒ Freya van den Bossche, former Vice-Prime Minister of Belgium
- ⇒ Carole Moinard, advisor to the former French Prime Minister Jean Pierre Raffarin
- ⇒ Christoph Gottschalk, advisor to the former French Prime Minister Jean Pierre Raffarin

In 2007, the National Committees of the European Youth Parliament celebrate their 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary and are proud of the achievements of these 20 years.

### **A special project: The first Euro-Mediterranean Youth Parliament**

The first Euro-Mediterranean Youth Parliament, held from 26 May to 3 June in the framework of the German EU Council Presidency in Berlin, was an initiative of the German Federal Foreign Office and was carried out by the European Youth Parliament (Heinz Schwarzkopf Foundation) and the Goethe Institute with the support of the European Commission, the Anna Lindh Foundation and the European Youth Forum.

The Euro-Mediterranean Youth Parliament continues the idea of the “European Youth Parliament” supported by the Heinz Schwarzkopf Foundation in the context of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership.

Some 100 participants from 38 countries attended the first Euro-Mediterranean Youth Parliament and, together with representatives of the European Youth Forum, SALTO and the Euro-Med Youth Platform, used their skills to help forge Euro-Mediterranean cooperation. The aim was to practise forms of parliamentary debate and to discuss the issues of tomorrow, with no regard for cultural or national boundaries.

The programme included team building sessions, working group meetings and input from experts. Issues included migration, the role of the media, globalization, art and culture, energy, youth and politics. The resolutions were discussed and drawn up by the participants in the working groups, and were then submitted to and debated by the Youth Parliament in its plenary session, along with a number of model project proposals. Many concrete follow-up project ideas were initiated and have been handed over to the local Goethe Institutes and the Anna Lindh Foundation.

The methodology of this first Euro-Mediterranean Youth Parliament was based on the know-how of the European Youth Parliament which was further developed and adapted for the special needs of the project.

In the future, the organisers want to continue to support the network of new initiatives and projects in the countries on both sides of the Mediterranean. The impulses from the youth

parliament were taken to the home countries of the participants. One of the main recommendations of the participants in Berlin is to provide support for setting up a permanent Euro-Mediterranean Youth Parliament.