



25th March 2007

Rome Youth Declaration

Preamble

We, the young people of Europe, gathered in Rome on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the Treaty of Rome to pay tribute to and continue the vision of those who made it possible for us to grow up in an environment of peace and prosperity, democracy and rule of law.

The European Union is where we live, study and work together; a place of equality, freedom, tolerance and solidarity; a process of integration which allows us to preserve our uniqueness and diversity; an area in which the local, regional, national and European realities coexist and cooperate for the sake of all of us; a space that will hopefully remain open to integrate its neighbours.

After successful decades, the European project nevertheless seems to have lost direction and inspiration. The rejection of the Constitutional Treaty by voters in France and the Netherlands was a clear symptom of the increasing uncertainty and dissatisfaction of the European people.

We, the young people of Europe, acknowledge the difficult and important challenges we face, increased insecurity and lack of social justice, especially concerning jobs and education, housing, and climate change. Globalisation and its effects on our economy, social rights and environment offers new opportunities and poses serious challenges, especially for the younger and future generations. We also cannot forget that poverty is still a reality in today's Europe.

Together, we have come up with answers and proposals that the European Union needs to implement. The European level is crucial to effectively address these issues, with the full involvement of its citizens. We want a European Union that promotes democratic values and Human Rights. We want a European Union that promotes sustainability, preserving our environment for future generations. We want a European Union that promotes the economic success and the social responsibility for all its citizens, especially the ones who are in greater need. We want a European Union that assumes its role in our globalised world. And for all that, we need a European Union capable of adapting its structures and procedures to its new realities.

As young people, European citizens of today and tomorrow, we declare our readiness to take our share of responsibility and ask the European leaders, gathered in Berlin, to join our efforts by agreeing on the following recommendations:

The future of the Constitutional Treaty

We, young Europeans, widely support a European Constitutional Treaty that should only include Part I, II and IV of the current Constitutional Treaty. It is crucial to reform the enlarged EU and equip it to meet the challenges of today and the opportunities of tomorrow. Such a revised document should be ratified as soon as possible.

The EU needs a more democratic, open decision-making system and a better communication in order to reconnect its citizens with the decisions taken. We urge for a reform of the European institutions, where the European Parliament co-decides in all policy fields and has the right to initiate legislation. Where the European Commission is transformed into a true European executive and is fully accountable to the Council and the Parliament. Such reform requires a real legitimate Constitution that can only be achieved through transparent and participatory procedures, such as the election of a Constitutional Assembly that will establish a democratic Convention and an EU-wide referendum.

Sustainable Development

We call for the European Union to take a leading role at the international level, to commonly create an enhanced sustainable development strategy, fulfilling its current commitments such as the Kyoto Protocol and the Millennium Development Goals, while setting forth new targets in the fields of industry, agriculture and the reduction of poverty. The European Union needs to strengthen its initiatives on social development, thus ending extreme poverty, guaranteeing Human Rights and ensuring the fulfilment of the basic human needs.

Our present environment with its ever ongoing climate change needs the European Union to adopt a common energy policy, based on research and development of renewable energy sources. The European Union should have a strategy to develop public transport in order to reduce greenhouse emissions, by decreasing the use of private transport and intracontinental flights, while supporting alternatives like railways and zero emission vehicles.

The European Union needs a better strategy on gender equality, the fight against all kinds of discrimination and the protection of environment, which can be achieved through educational and awareness campaigns.

Sustainable Development is a key issue for the future of our Europe. When negotiating on the international level and with neighbouring countries, the European Union should abide by the above policies.

Youth and Education in the EU

Access to education

Member States must finally face their responsibilities and ensure that everyone has access to every form of education regardless of their economic, social and cultural background. This is one of our basic and fundamental human rights. The EU must push for the creation and implementation of National Action Plans on accessibility of education within the existing processes and strategies on education.

Non-formal education

Non-formal education is of paramount importance to society in the EU. It must be recognised by institutions through curricula and by wider society as complimentary of formal education.

The EU must guarantee an increased budget for funding NGOs as the primary providers of non-formal education and the promoters of civic participation, human rights and democracy.

Europe in education

European awareness and understanding have to be ensured by including European history and European issues in formal national curricula, including Human Rights education, intercultural learning and active citizenship.

The EU's role in a Globalised world

The European Union must play a more leading role in the global arena to spread prosperity and promote the values of peace, security, solidarity and equality as well as the principles of Human Rights. It is crucial that Europe speaks in one voice and should thus have a strong Common Foreign and Security Policy.

Development aid is essential to the long term success and sustainability of a European Common Foreign and Security Policy. Aid should be conducted with a clear focus on: sustainable development, promoting Human Rights, access to essential medicine and fair trade in order to eradicate poverty. The European Union should empower and support developing nations and apply non-tariff requirements to all agreements, including Association Agreements. This strategy will also help to tackle the root causes of immigration.

Young people and youth organisations can greatly contribute to achieving these objectives and should be involved in the development and implementation of EU foreign policy as partners and stakeholders.

The Social and Economic Model of the EU

Our vision on the social and economic model is based on the affirmation of fundamental social rights within a competitive economic context bringing social justice including equal opportunities and fight against all kinds of discrimination. This system can only be achieved through the development of high social protection levels, wealth redistribution measures, social and employment regulation combined with State responsibility for full employment and equality of jobs and for providing services of general interest. This could be achieved through contracts of confidence between public authorities and young people.

In this view we see as crucial the full implementation of the European Youth Pact, including fair and quality jobs for all young people in Europe and eradication of precariousness of working conditions. It is also important to ensure independent housing to all young people together with a coherent fight against social exclusion of young people by implementing a minimum income strategy, also taking into consideration national contexts. It is a priority to work towards the full respect of the freedom of movement within the EU boundaries by enabling all young people to take part in exchange programmes throughout Europe as well as abolishing mobility obstacles.

In order to achieve the goals above, social partners and civil society organisations, especially Youth Organizations, should be involved in decision-making process concerning issues such as: the management of demographic change, the debate on flexicurity, the reform of pensions system and the development of European migration and integration policies.

Building Democracy and Civil Society in Europe

The stakeholders at all levels, governments and EU institutions must include youth organisations and young people coming from diverse backgrounds in all youth-related decision-making processes. The EU has to be transparent in order to increase the inclusiveness of and trust in the decision-making bodies and in the EU.

Public authorities must recognise and use the potential of youth organisations and alternative types of participation, which function as schools for democracy and active citizenship. The Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) bridge the gap between where the policies are made and where they are implemented. Funding for NGOs is important in enabling them to work efficiently and to create spaces for dialogue which are accessible to young people.

There is a need for targeted youth information strategy including peer-to-peer communication and feedback from all levels. Member States should bring the European dimension to national, regional and local political debates.

A good means to increase youth participation is lowering the voting age to 16. The removal of mobility obstacles, in particular visa obstacles, is crucial to strengthen the civil society even outside the EU borders.

Listen to what we have to say, ask us what we need and then act!