

FINAL DOCUMENT CATALAN NATIONAL DEBATE

“What youth want for the Europe of the future?”

Introduction

The Catalan National Debate entitled “What do we young people want for the Europe of the future?” was held on March 9th 2007. After the presentation of the National Youth Council of Catalonia and the institutions backing the event (Representation of the European Commission in Barcelona, Barcelona Office of the European Parliament and Youth Secretariat) we had speeches by two MEPs, Ignasi Guardans (Convergència i Unió (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe) and Raul Romeva (Iniciativa per Catalunya-Verds / European Greens), as well as two members of the Congress of Deputies, Meritxell Batet (Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya, on behalf of the European Socialists) and Georgina Oliva (Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya, on behalf of the European Free Alliance), who presented an overview of the subject. Following that, four working parties were set up that brought their conclusions to the plenary session, from which the following points emerged.

Young People and Education

The debate was structured along three axes: the quality of formal education, accessibility to formal education and recognition of non-formal education.

The quality of formal education has to be improved. The group asked itself what is happening with adolescents. The European perspective has to be introduced, while linguistic competence has to be improved (both in the recognition of languages and in speaking more languages). There has to be a return to humanistic education (which has been lost in favour of a CV at the service of companies). This is a negative development as it promotes education for specific ends as opposed to Lifelong Learning.

With regard to accessibility to formal education we have to safeguard the criteria of equity for obtaining grants. Family circumstances should not hold back educational advances (through quotas or cut-off marks).

As for the recognition of non-formal education, the associations are a basic axis of non-formal education and the promotion of citizens' participation and democracy. Non-formal education has to be recognised by institutions (curriculum and budget) and by society. Links have to be created between non-formal and formal education to reinforce a global concept of education. Young people have to be valued as the promoters of non-formal education for the multiplying effect they have.

The European Union has a crucial part to play in creating European citizens, and should be both bold and progressive. The problem with the European Union is that it has not told people clearly what it is. According to Nietzsche, “A time will come when the only political way forward is education”.

Building Democracy and Civil Society

The problem is ignorance of the institutions and the impact they have on the daily lives of the citizens of Europe. A European constitution is necessary to establish a more democratic European Union in which people can participate more. There has to be more information about the existing help and access to it.

We have to have a stronger and more participative European parliament, with greater jurisdiction in more areas. The results of the participation of the people have to be visible to them. Structural changes in the workings of the institutions are necessary, such as the disappearance of the right of veto.

Social networks have to be strengthened, like for example the European Youth Forum (which has to act as a bridge between the European Union and society). Civil society has to be active not just at a local level but also at a trans-national or international level.

In primary school education, awareness raising of the existence of the European Union has to be inculcated. The principle of subsidiarity has to be strengthened (nations also have to be represented in the European Union, not just the States).

The European Union model has to be exported with regard to the Welfare State, Human Rights Charter, and so on.

Sustainable Development

We believe that the European Union has to be a world leader in sustainable development. We live in a physical world that is finite, in which the resources cannot be exploited endlessly. Therefore, the production of goods and services cannot grow indefinitely. As a result, the European Union has to assume that the policy of sustainable development has to envisage the reduction of growth and production.

As an international leader in environmental matters, the European Union also has to take the lead in the application of the Kyoto Protocol. This means leading by example and reducing CO² emissions using instruments of environmental policies and environmental taxation.

Given that most of the population lives in cities, it is essential to develop sustainable policies for the future. These include the reduction of energy consumption, sustainable mobility, and water and waste management. Moreover, territorial organization has to follow certain criteria of sustainability and view managing the territory as a value in itself.

Finally, we do not consider that the path to follow for Europe should include nuclear power stations, in the sense of the current use made of them. This energy is dangerous, expensive and emits CO² throughout its process. Moreover, uranium is a limited resource and the waste material obtained from this process is highly radioactive and cannot be treated. The only alternative is the reduction of energy consumption and renewable forms of energy, including non-polluting nuclear energy (fusion). Investment and research into this technology has to be encouraged.

The European Union in a Globalized World

The internal values of the European Union (external cooperation, sustainability and peace) have to be present in its foreign policies. Internal European experience has to be assumed at world level. It is very important for Europe to speak with one voice. This can be applied to other European policies, like for example development cooperation or the fight against climate change. What's more, the European Union ought to be present as a single voice at economic symposia (International Monetary Fund meetings, etc.)

There needs to be a suitable diplomatic corps with a unified army at a European level to give the diplomatic policy force, without military policy being an end in itself. The existence of this army is justifiable for the resolution of international disputes, not for humanitarian aid or development cooperation. Its centralization has to entail a reduction of forces and military expense in Europe as a whole.

The European Union's neighbours have to be involved in development cooperation. We have the positive example of incorporating new countries. The European Union has to influence North Africa and Russia so that they adopt the democratic values of the Union and respect for human rights as their own.

In a globalized world, the representativeness of the European Union has to be improved, involving local bodies, regions and stateless nations in decision-making at a European level.

Final Conclusions

The young people of Catalonia with their contributions to the debate wish to present the European leaders with the following main ideas:

- Formal and non-formal education of young people is a basic element for the construction of European citizens, and quality, access and recognition has to be guaranteed.
- Both the European institutions and civil society have to be strengthened to improve democracy.
- We young people are very aware of the need for a real policy of sustainable development that involves the efforts of everyone.
- The European Union has to have a strong foreign policy that is coherent with the founding principles of the Union.