

ROME YOUTH SUMMIT

INPUTS from the DANISH debate

Introduction

The Danish debate on *Your Europe - Your Future* was organised by the Danish Youth Council (DUF) in close collaboration with the Commission Representation in Denmark. DUF is an umbrella organisation for 70 children and youth organisations in Denmark, thus representing approx. 600000 youngsters in Denmark.

Generation of a national youth *mandate* on such an important multi-dimensional issue as the future of the EU would require inclusion of a substantial number of people in order for it to be genuinely representative for youngsters in Denmark. Due to the limited time given for national consultations DUF decided that it would be impossible for us get in contact with enough people to generate an actual national mandate on the six themes of discussion.

Instead we decided to focus on preparing our Danish representatives at the Rome Summit. With assistance from the Commission Representation we thus arranged an open 'preparation seminar' for the six Danish participants in the Rome Youth Summit.

The purpose of the seminar was to give prepare to the six Danish representatives at the Rome Summit to participate in their particular topic of discussion. Invited to give inputs to the representatives were all DUF member organisations as well as young people in general. Also, we had invited 'opponents' in terms of politicians, experts and NGO representatives to give inputs to each of the discussion topics.

Below are listed *some* of the many good points and opinions that were raised by the participants during the discussions in the House of Europe on the 13.03.07 in Copenhagen.

Youth and Education

European Union into the school: it was argued that information about EU should be a part of formal education in primary school.

European Exchange programmes 1: It is time to start focusing on quality instead of quantity. Exchange is good! But we need to look into the fact that today too many gets too little out of spending a semester at a university in another European country.

European Exchange Programmes 2: It should be possible for high school students to use the EU youth programme get exchanged to a high school in another EU country (or a country outside the EU). And to get full validation for their efforts within their national education afterwards.

Science in education: The European Lisbon strategy focuses a lot on the connection between higher education and access to the labour marked, especially regarding

structuring of the educational system so that it fits into the labour market. But higher education should not only be seen as a tool to prepare young people to enter the labour market.

Education policy: An important question is, if educational policy should continue to be a national matter or if we could gain anything by making it trans-national? Pros and cons were discussed briefly.

Democracy and Civil Society

Lowering of the voting age to 16. Young people don't want to get engaged in the debate on the European Union unless they are given access to the actual decision making process. The voting age for elections to the European parliament must be lowered to 16. – At the same time it was emphasized that lowering of the voting age will not ensure participation as such. But it could be a step on the way.

Merchandise: It is important to make the EU visible – to brand the European Union. But please; make better European merchandise (and spend less money on it)!

Media: reporting on the EU in the media is often too academic. And there is too little of it.

Politicians: the politicians need to enter into the debate on the EU. And they need to help making the EU more relevant to (young) people.

The EU for young people: When trying to engage young people in the debate on the European Union and society as such, we have to remember that

- young people are lazy. They don't want to travel far or have to read too many papers when engaging in a debate.
- Spreading of information about the European Union is just as important as generating debate.
- When making projects and debates on the EU it is important to make set-ups that reach out to people a broad spectrum of people. Too often in EU debates we preach to the choir. This only enforces the development of an elitist EU.

The EU as such: One of the problems is that the EU is too bureaucratic, too complicated and too closed to the general public. As an example hereof is the decision making procedures of the EU, a very basic thing for a political organisation. Yet it is so complicated within the EU that hardly anyone understands it. Another example is that you have to show ID and get your bag scanned in order to get into the Commission building. All in all, examples like these scares people off and crush whatever incitement to get more engaged in EU matters.

Sustainable development

Coherence: It was argued that one of the major problems is that EU is lacking coherence especially with respect to trade policy and development policy: On the one hand there is a strong focus on development aid within the EU but on the other hand the European trade policy discriminates development countries. For instance, regulation to ensure food safety

is very good for the Europeans but it has negative consequences in terms of keeping development countries out of the European markets.

CAP: It was proposed to put a complete halt on the CAP ASAP. Pros and cons of re-arranging contra stopping the CAP were debated.

Development aid: all the youth branches of the political parties in Denmark have agreed on recommending the Danish state to pay 1% of its GDP in development aid.

Zero-sum approach: The zero-sum approach to sustainability, development aid, energy policy, CAP etc. that is dominant within the EU at present must be stopped. Investments in energy and development aid are highly profitable.

Education: It is important that sustainability is a direct part of primary school education throughout Europe.

The EU in a globalised world

Equal opportunities/gender issues: pros and cons of focusing only on women's rights in stead of human rights were discussed: On the one hand it is too narrow only to focus on women. On the other hand, a focus on human rights in general could be too broad and not very efficient.

Common language: It was argued that we need a common working language in Europe! English would be the obvious choice.

Common EU foreign polity: perspectives of getting a common EU foreign policy – and a rapid reaction force of some sorts - were discussed. In that regard it was mentioned that those who have the ability to do something about a problem also have the duty.

Intercultural dialogue: the discussion paper made at the preparation meeting in Bruxelles lacks thoughts on intercultural dialogue. As young people we need to discuss what kind of dialogue we want to have with surrounding countries and cultures.

Exchange: we need better exchange programmes so that European youth can travel outside the European Union and vice versa. You become just as good a young European by getting exchanged to Egypt for 6 months as going to Spain!

The Future of the Constitutional Treaty

Future of the Constitutional Treaty: It was argued that the EU does not need a constitutional treaty. Constitutional treaties are for states, not for cooperation between states. And the countries within the EU are too different to become one state with a Constitution.

This was opposed: the EU does need a constitutional treaty. In a mini format, if that is the only realistic possibility. Ratification of the constitutional treaty could happen through a national referendum.

Institutional changes 1: The role of the Commission was discussed: It was argued that in order to strengthen democracy within the union, the Commission should be replaced by the national governments. Democracy should evolve directly through the member states. This was opposed; the Commission is democratic as such. – It is elected by democratic governments in Europe. To strengthen democracy it might be a good idea to make the EP more involved in election of the Commission as such.

Institutional changes 2: The EP is a democratic kindergarden, it was argued! It doesn't function, people don't care about, hence the low voting rates, and the European politicians are second hand politicians. Therefore, the EP should not have more decision making power than at present.

This was opposed: Just because the election rate wasn't very high at the last elections doesn't mean that the EP does not work or does not have a function in the EU. Instead, more should be done in order to get more people to vote for the EP.

Social and economic model

Social rights: Pros and cons of introducing more substantial social and economical rights on a European level were discussed.

On the one hand it was argued that more substantial cooperation on social and economical issues would be a benefit for EU. We are so culturally alike that it would be a great advantage for us. Also, it would make EU more relevant to people.

On the other hand it could pose some serious problems for the different national welfare models.

Minimum wages: Pros and cons of having minimum wages at European level were discussed.

It was argued that introduction of minimum wages could pose a thread to the Danish welfare system.

