

## **ROME YOUTH SUMMIT – Input from Finland’s National Debate**

Helsinki, March 16, 2007

### **Introduction**

The Finnish debate for the campaign “Your Europe – your future” was organised by the National Youth Council of Finland, Allianssi, in co-operation with JEF – Finland, the National Agency CIMO and the European Commission Representation in Finland. Allianssi is the platform of 107 youth organisations, i.e. all the relevant national youth organisations and organisations working for young people.

The national debate took place on March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2007 in Helsinki with an open invitation to all those interested in the future of Europe. Due to the closeness of our parliamentary elections, the number of participants was not as high as expected, but about 40 people took part in the debate with very fruitful and lively discussions. The main speaker was Mrs. Heidi Hautala (MP, Green Party) who challenged the young people and the youth organisations to take part in the discussion about the future of Europe and especially about the Constitutional Treaty. After the speech the participants discussed the issues in the working groups, and also a panel of young people was arranged.

### **Future of the EU treaty**

There was a long discussion about the reasons why the constitutional treaty was rejected in France and in the Netherlands and how to go forward now. There was a consensus that the “Constitution Plus” model (previous constitution + something new about e.g. climate change, immigration, environment, social dimension) should be taken forward by the “YES-20” countries in the European Council of June. The European Parliament should then discuss the new treaty and the role of the ngo’s should be significant in the preparation process.

Perhaps even a new convention should be organised if possible. In any case, an intergovernmental conference which will determine the contents of the treaty should be organised at the end of the year 2007. Then during the year 2008, the referendums should be organised in those countries who wish to do so, and all the national parliaments should adopt the treaty before the end of the year. The treaty will enter into force in 2009, and the new European Parliament will be elected according to the seat division agreed in the treaty.

### **Sustainable Development**

The big question in this group was whether we are looking for a one big solution or several smaller ones, to make radical changes in order not to wait for a big crisis. The developing countries are essential for the environment but EU clearly has its own role in this matter.

There were some clear recommendations, like e.g. a ceresine tax for EU’s internal flights, but EU should concentrate to support in its own development policy the structures, principles and practises of environment protection. Relations to the USA, the role and attitudes of the private sector as well as investments to bioenergy were seen as sustainable solutions. The assessment of environmental impacts should be taken into consideration in all relevant decisions.

## **Building Democracy and Civil Society in Europe**

This working group gave clear recommendations on e.g. the importance of the information and the role of the schools. There are not enough of European exchanges at school and high school level. Also the knowledge of young people on Europe is not sufficiently high, and therefore their personal motivation on the opportunities of Europe is low. To reach the young people, the schools are the best place. The participation of young people should be encouraged, e.g. with the establishment local youth councils.

Also the political parties do not wish to raise EU issues into discussion as they are afraid of losing popularity. Often those who are critical towards the European Union are the most loud ones. Several proposals were made to raise the interests of young people to take part in politics and to use their vote in the elections, e.g. to lower the voting age to 16, to have cross-national or EU-wide referendums, to arrange election also in places where young people are (youth clubs and schools) or to arrange youth elections.

The role of the ngo's is also very important. Their funding should be secured, and they should be involved in the decision-making processes. These processes should also be open and visible both in the EU and the member states. It is also a challenge to find out which groups of young people are completely left out of the participation processes.

## **Youth and Education**

There was a lot of discussion about the educational system in general, e.g. that the students should have more active role in the classes, to have different ways of teaching with different groups and to change the educational system so that the transfer to working life is easier. It should be easier to compare the education in the whole area of the EU. A quality basic education should be a right of every EU citizen.

The role of the EU could be to provide support and materials to the education, to improve the opportunities to international exchanges and other ways of developing the European identity, already at the primary school level, but at all the other levels of education. These exchanges should be open to all students, regardless of their socio-economic position or other barriers they may face.

The role of non-formal education should be recognised and supported. The role of ngo's is important in this field.

## **EU's Role in a Globalised World**

Due to the important economic role of the EU, it has to take into consideration the fair trade principles to maintain stability in the world. Union's role in the development work is crucial, and therefore it has to fulfill the criteria of international agreements (0,7 % of the GNP).

The EU should have more important role in the future in maintaining peace and stability. Therefore it should develop its co-operation with the UN and NATO with emphasis to prevent military and civil crisis. Union should work towards a more equal distribution of wealth among different parts of the world to avoid the possible crisis, due to e.g. hunger and pollution. In its own foreign policy, the Union should promote its own values, e.g. sustainable development and equality (especially the situation of women).

The Union should also be proactive in the environmental questions by encouraging all the countries to sign international agreements, and by developing alternative ways to produce

energy. These new ways could also be an important competition asset for the EU in the future. The Union should also be able to speak with one voice in the world policy. To achieve these aims, a constitutional treaty should be signed and e.g. a post of EU's foreign minister should be established.