

The guide to organising your own

# DEBATE WATCHING PARTY

**#CHANGEISCOMING**  
**#MAASTRICHTDEBATE**



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## What is it all about?

As part of its efforts to make young people a European political priority, the European Youth Forum, together with the University and City of Maastricht, Politico and the European Journalism Centre, are organising a televised debate between leading candidates in the 2019 European Elections, who are running for the position of President of the European Commission.

The debate will last 90 minutes and will be divided into three themes. The debate will be held in English, with subtitles provided in other major languages.

## When and where?

The debate will take place in the Theater aan het Vrijthof in Maastricht, the Netherlands, on 29 April 2019, and will start at 19:00 CET. The live audience will consist of several hundred young people.

## Watch it live!

It will be broadcast live by POLITICO Europe and live streamed on YouTube on a designated channel. The debate will feature one leading candidate for the position of European Commission President (known as “Spitzenkandidaten”) from the following political parties:

- Bas Eickhout, European Green Party (EGP)
- Frans Timmermans, Party of European Socialists (PES)
- Manfred Weber, European People’s Party (EPP) - tbc
- Jan Zahradil, Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists in Europe (ACRE)
- Guy Verhofstadt, Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE),

The debate will have two moderators:  
Ryan Heath, Political Editor at POLITICO Europe  
Rianne Letschert, Rector of Maastricht University.

You can also get involved in the discussions on social media using the official hashtag of the event **#MaastrichtDebate**

## What are the questions?

The debate will be divided into 3 main themes, to explore the views and ideas of the candidates more in depth on the following:

1. Digital Europe
2. Sustainable Europe
3. The Future of Europe

The exact questions will be selected from three different sources: directly by the moderators, by members of the live audience at the debate, and lastly from online viewers picked up via an online poll. More details on this will follow.

## Our ideas for organising debate-watching events

The Maastricht Debate will be watched all over Europe. Why not get involved by joining in one of the many watch parties near you - or even organise your own! To bring the European debate to every corner of Europe, we encourage you to mobilise your own networks and organise events with your own local organisations, schools, universities, National Youth Council or even just your group of friends. A map of events happening will be featured on the European Parliament's own [campaign website](#).

### In Brussels on 29 April?

The European Youth Forum will organise its own large-scale Debate Watching Party in Brussels, on the Esplanade of the European Parliament. It will be the place to watch the debate for all those living in Brussels, and will be the opportunity to bring in youth perspectives and other reactions to the debate. We invite all of you who have the chance to be in Brussels on 29 April to join us for an evening of European excitement. We will be partnering with some major European media outlets, so watch this space!

### How to organise a Maastricht side-event?

We invite you to come up with a side-event that best matches your interests, resources and audience. Below we present a few options that we invite you to use or adapt!

On the following pages you will find ideas on how to organise:

- A debate with local MEP candidates ahead or after the Maastricht Debate
- A debate-watching, interactive, event

## Idea 1:

### Debate-watching interactive event

A live Maastricht Debate-watching event in your town or city can be an amazing opportunity for the local young people and civil society to engage with the European public debate ahead of the European Elections 2019.

\*We strongly recommend allocating a representative, expert or facilitator to guide everyone through discussions.\*

Example schedule of a debate-watching party:

**18:00 - 19:00** - Before the Maastricht Debate starts

Gathering participants in advance of the Debate is a good opportunity to introduce the idea of the event, explain the plan for the evening and address any initial questions.

Take some time to open up the discussion about the upcoming European Elections, when are they

happening, who and how can they vote and who they can vote for.

Explain European political parties at European level and where the different political parties at your national level belong (if you have time). Explain also briefly the 'leading candidates' ('Spitzenkandidaten') process that your audience is about to watch.

**19:00** - Start of the Maastricht debate and the live-streaming on Politico and YouTube

This is the moment the debate in Maastricht will start. During the live stream, everyone should be encouraged to tweet or share their watching stories on social media, to engage other young people by their example and show what young people across Europe think and need from the leaders to deliver.

**20:30** - End of the Maastricht Debate - debriefing time

Try to leave some time after the live stream is over to debrief with the audience. What are the audiences reactions to the Debate? Did what they hear make any impact on their voting intentions? If your event is on a bigger scale and you have the resources to do so, invite the local media to provide commentary on the debate, but also on your event and the engagement of young people there. They might also interview you as organisers or some political figures at your event.

Examples of questions to start the discussion:

*\* What is your main impression of the debate?*

*\* How do you see the performance of the candidates? Did any of them convince you about a certain issue or to vote a certain way?*

*\* Do you feel that there were different directions / visions for the future of Europe presented in the debate? If so, which ones?*

*\* Do you think that young people were targeted successfully in the debate? Were issues important to you raised in the discussion? If so, which ones?*

This part can last between 30 and 45 minutes, depending on the dynamics from the participants.

**21:00** - End of the debate-watching part of the event (optional: start of networking drinks / party time)

At this point you can either say goodbye to the participants and close the event, or still hold some networking drinks or a party, depending on your resources and ideas.

## Idea 2:

### **Debate with local MEP candidates ahead or after the Maastricht Debate**

One of the most traditional ways of interaction between candidates and voters are electoral debates with question & answer sessions.

When organising an event, it is good to ask yourself and your team the question: why are we doing this, for whom and what do we want to achieve as an outcome. The 'how' is a second step. The target group and your audience in this case could be, for instance, young people from youth organisations from your area, university students, secondary education students, non-organised youth, but also local civil society, etc.

One of the first steps in organising an event is to decide on its date and securing the venue. Good ideas for a venue for a debate can be a university hall, city hall room, a small theater, a room in the representation office of the European Parliament or European Commission (if your city happens to have one), or a more informal setting like a bar, depending on your audience and idea.

You could organise your event shortly before the TV debate, as an introduction and build-up to it, or shortly after, as more of a reflection, reaction, and follow-up of the Maastricht Debate.

You can also link and brand an event you are already working on in relation to European Elections 2019 as a Maastricht Debate side-event, and we will feature it on the events' map.

### **Theme of the debate**

In the earliest stage of planning choose the focus and topic of your event. Such a debate can have a wider theme related to the 'Future of Europe' or 'Youth priorities for the European elections', where there is a variety of topics addressed by the candidates and the young participants. You can also focus your debate on the same topics as the Maastricht debate, that is Digital Europe, Future of Europe and a theme still to be selected by young people.

### **Invitations**

The moment you have selected a theme, time and preferably a venue, proceed to sending out the invitations to MEP candidates to be speakers at your event. You might want to invite people from different political parties and movements running for the European elections 2019. A good idea is to make a list with several candidates per party to be invited with a priority order - if one declines, another can be invited instead. Another option is to contact campaign teams of political parties / movements and ask them to delegate a candidate to attend. Keep in mind gender balance in terms of speakers at your events.

### **Partners & patronages**

Consider whether you want or need any partner organisations for the event - whether they can bring useful resources or expertise. To increase the visibility and recognition of an event it might be worth asking for honorary patronages from relevant institutions and media patronages / partnerships. A suitable honorary

patron for such a debate might be the European Commission representation office in your country, European Parliament office in your state, the Ministry of Foreign / European Affairs or the office of your region. Those institutions usually have a procedure of applying for patronages described on their websites, as well as the application deadlines. Usually it is 1 month in advance at latest.

These institutions might help you in more ways with your event, such as offering the venue / room for free, paying for catering (or other aspects of the event) or helping with event promotion. In some cases European Parliament's office in your country might help you with contacting some MEPs for your event (especially once you have established a good relationship with them).

## Participants & promotion

Once you start planning the event, decide for whom you organise it. Is it meant to be more of a 'closed' event for members of your networks or open to the public? It is recommended to have an open event that is promoted both among your networks but also to a wider audience - local youth and students in particular.

To ensure that you have the expected amount of participants and that you reached out beyond the usual networks, it might be worth investing in some promotion. You can set up a Facebook event and pay for the promotion, so others outside your usual social media followers can also find out about it. If you want to target students, talk with student unions, university / high school student administration, so they can promote it towards their students. If you have the possibility, print out some posters that you can hang in different parts of the city or at university campuses for example.

Also, prepare a short press release about the event and send it out to your local media, together with the invitation to your event. This is why it is worth asking some of them for media patronage, because you can usually ask for a free press release publication, accompanied with social media posts. Invite journalists to your event to cover it and interview the candidates. The more 'high-profile' the speakers or guests, the more likely it is that journalists will attend your event. However, it is not only the 'prominence' of guests that attracts media, it can be the relevance of the topic, good timing in relation to political events or an interesting or innovative format of the event or its promotion.