



Wilfried
Martens Centre
for European Studies

Young People Bridging the Gap Launch of the *European View* issue 'Young Politics'

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Stanhope Hotel, Rue du Commerce 9, 1000 Brussels



The Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies launched its policy journal *European View* at a dedicated event, called 'Young People Bridging the Gap'. The launch focused on two topics: matching education to labour market needs and bringing politics to the youth. The issues were tackled by three speakers: Monika Panayotova, Member of the European Parliament (MEP); Eva Majewski, Chairwoman of the European Democrat Students (EDS) and Juha-Pekka Nurvala, First Vice President of the Youth of the European People's Party (YEPP). The participants were given the floor for opinion and questions during the debate moderated by José Luis Fontalba, Head of Communications at the Martens Centre.

The event was attended by around 80 young professionals as well as thinkers and *European View* contributors who provided their opinion on young people in politics, education and entrepreneurship.



The session was kicked off by Tomi Huhtanen, Director of the Martens Centre and Editor-in-Chief of the *European View*. He delivered the initial address, emphasising the continuous efforts by the Martens Centre to keep the topic of youth high on the agenda in Brussels. Then he gave the floor to Ingrid Habets, Research Officer, Martens Centre and Assistant Editor-in-Chief of the *European View*. She pointed out that the ‘Young Politics’ issue addresses the commitment of young people to European society. Despite the perception that the millennial generation would be disengaged from politics, contributions to the *European View* show the contrary and that values of responsibility and solidarity remain high.



Eva Majewski focused on the recently completed project of the Martens Centre — the Up2Youth online platform—and the fact that concrete policy proposals by young people across the EU have been included in the EPP Action Programme as a separate section. She emphasised the fact that it was the first time a political party is opening up its election programme to direct input by European youth. According to her, online platforms should serve as a good practice when it comes to youth participation in politics, because they are an alternative channel of communication. Majewski proposed a higher education reform measure that would close the gap between education and labour market — the dual vocational system should be considered across the EU. She also added that work experience and informal education need to be recognised as a must in order to achieve personal and professional growth.

Juha-Pekka Nurvala approached the topic of young people in politics by emphasising the fact that young people are interested in politics in a broad sense but at the same time disengaged with electoral politics. He added that the alarmingly low turn-outs in elections undermines the legitimacy of the governance system as a whole. Nurvala said that one of the reasons for youth disengagement from electoral politics is the growing individualism and changing values of young society. These two elements increase the distance between young people and political parties. He suggested six measures that would encourage electoral participation of young people: bring politics to secondary schools; lower the statutory voting age to 16; introduce youth councils at local level in EU member states; introduce independent youth parliaments in all EU member states; popularise the citizens’ initiatives; rethink the political approach to connect with young voters.





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Monika Panayotova said that often politicians speak about young voters, supporters, party members, constituents, etc. but we should not forget that voters are people. She also added that there are many misconceptions about young people: they are seen as a target group; as a vulnerable group; as supporters to already made decisions; as passive subjects to action. According to Panayotova, young people are not a problem but a part of the solution. She pointed out that more young people should be given the floor in politics, because they will be transmitters for young people's ideas. Youth councils/parliaments at the local, national and European levels could be part of the solution. On education, Panayotova said that new skills are needed — soft and transferrable skills — problem solving, teamwork, critical thinking and language skills. Education should be more about entrepreneurial attitude and behaviour. In this regard, the MEP added that she has proposed to the European Commission to announce a European Year for Entrepreneurship as an effort to streamline programmes, funding tools and government priorities across the EU.



The presentations were followed by remarks and questions from the participants. They focused on topics such as entrepreneurship as a solution to the employment issue, the perception of failure and how to overcome that through education at school. The issue of reducing administrative burden was discussed too. The general perception is that there should be less government interference in order to avoid overregulation.

