

COMPETITION REPORT

The European Parliament – Why should I care?

The European Policy Centre (EPC) – supported by the European Parliament – took a stand this year against the constant lamenting about low public awareness and participation in EP elections by organising a competition entitled: “The European Parliament – Why should I care?”

Our competition call invited young people from all 28 Member States to express in an innovative and convincing manner how the EP affects their lives and why they plan – or not – to vote in the upcoming European elections of 2014. Participants were encouraged to use any creative ways to present their opinions and draw attention to their ideas.

The underlying aim of our initiative was to raise awareness among young people of the European Parliament's role in representing citizens, defending their rights and values in the EU's policy-making process, and offering them opportunities for political and social change.

The target group was young European citizens (age 16-30) from across the EU – a population sample of close to 100 million people, including the leaders, parents and entrepreneurs of the future, as well as those responsible for supporting and taking forward the integration project.

Contrary to many stereotypes about young people, recent movements from the “Indignados” in Spain to the “Occupy” protests worldwide show that the European youth – severely hit by the on-going crisis – cares deeply about social issues, is acutely aware of European principles such as solidarity and tolerance, and is passionately committed to working for progress.

At the same time, however, many young people in the EU do not actually exercise their right to vote in EP elections and do not engage in the European policy-making process more generally. The previous EP elections in 2009 saw an extremely high rate of abstention among young people, at 71% of EU average. This apathy stems from a popular feeling of estrangement and dissatisfaction with the Union but also from a widespread lack of understanding about how the European Parliament can provide people with tangible benefits and with a channel of influence over EU policy, such as by direct participation in European elections.

To address this awareness deficit we decided to give young people an outlet to express their own vision/voice in relation to the EP and European democracy, in the hope that this will allow them to 'learn by doing' and 'learn by understanding' the powers of the European Parliament and its added-value to the lives of European citizens. It was our firm belief that Europe's young people represent a segment of the population which is most avid for information as well as most prone to acquiring the habit of active citizenship. Research demonstrates

In the competition call, the EPC invited young citizens from all 28 EU member states to express in a creative and convincing manner why the European Parliament is important to them, and why there is a need to vote in the next EP elections.

20 winners were selected from among all the contributions received and they were rewarded with a trip to Brussels in order to present their entries, exchange ideas with decision makers and like-minded young Europeans, and see the European Parliament at work. Highlights from this project and their visit are documented in this report.

that if first-time voters miss the first opportunity to vote, for instance in the 2014 EP elections, they are also unlikely to vote in subsequent national or European elections. Thus, by targeting young Europeans, we sought to help them realise that they can actually make a difference via civic and political involvement/participation in EU affairs/elections.

We made use of an extensive campaign in order to reach our audience, including social media (like Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest), several thousand youth organisations, networks and student groups, in addition to other, more traditional, communication channels (such as an advertisement on euobserver.com). The competition was announced on approximately 250 webpages in different EU languages, received over 840 likes on Facebook, was shared by more than 1460 users and had an average weekly reach of 867 Facebook members.

A substantial number of outstanding applications were submitted from all over Europe in response to our competition call. From all the contributions received, an international jury consisting of representatives from think tanks, media, a youth network, and the EP had the difficult task of selecting 20 successful entries. The winners' prize consisted of an once-in-a-lifetime trip to Brussels in the second week of July 2013.

Heartfelt congratulations go to the competition winners, age 16-28, coming from 13 different Member States, individual or group entries represented by: **Selina Adedeji** (Italy/Belgium), **Georgios Ampatzidis** (Greece), **Ciana Curley** (Ireland), **Bruna da Costa Pedrosa** (Portugal), **Marina di Fiore** (Italy), **Alicia Garcia Sierra** (Spain), **Elena Georgiou** (Cyprus), **Amar Jasarevic** (Sweden), **Teodora Koleva** (Bulgaria), **Julian Kornprobst** (Austria), **Spiros Kotsomanidis** (Cyprus), **Ivana Krajnc** (Slovenia), **Stergios Mamalis** (Greece), **Edgaras Mascinskas** (Lithuania/UK), **Panagiotis Neofytou** (Cyprus), **Antonija Niksic** (Croatia), **Marisa Tosi** (Germany/Italy), **Petros Tsanides** (Cyprus), **Nadezhda Pancheva Tzocheva** (Bulgaria), and **Esther Zitterl** (Austria).

To have a look at the winning entries, which include videos, digital art photography, posters, comics, essays, a theatre play, a board game, and a song, please visit the competition's platforms:

www.pinterest.com/epccompetition/competition-winners-european-parliament-why-should/

www.facebook.com/ep.competition



The winners of the competition "The European Parliament – Why should I care?"

The competition winners' trip to Brussels

As 'reward', the 20 winners of the competition were invited to participate in a work-intensive visit to Brussels, which was designed *inter alia* to enhance the participants' knowledge about the European Parliament, and to provide them with the skills to develop their own creative talents in order to stimulate a debate with others around EU politics, policies and values.

The trip to Brussels enabled the winners:

- to experience first-hand how the European Parliament functions, to witness the EP Committee on Education and Culture at work, to exhibit their entries and discuss their ideas directly with MEPs at a roundtable debate hosted by **Katarina Neved'alová** (Slovakia), MEP, and featuring also **Eider Gardiazabal Rubial** (Spain), MEP; **Antigoni Papadopoulou** (Cyprus), MEP; **Nikola Vuljanic** (Croatia), MEP, and **Ioannis Latoudis** (Greece), EP Policy Adviser;

"We all bear responsibility for our decisions. If we disagree with the decision of others, let us be the source of change. Let us be proactive, go to the ballots in the upcoming elections and prove that our voices count."

said **Katarina Neved'alová** (MEP) during the meeting to the young Europeans, while **Nikola Vuljanic** (MEP) advised the winners:

"It is not only your right, it is your duty to go vote and to convince the ones in your environment to do the same."

- to establish links to EU practitioners and experts in order to further develop their ability to communicate their opinions, knowledge and understanding of the European Parliament (and of the European Union) to a wider audience.

The group attended a workshop on EU's institutions and decision-making by **Corina Stratulat**, EPC Policy Analyst; discussed about voting patterns in the Parliament with **Doru Frantescu**, Policy Director at *VoteWatch Europe*; engaged in a peer-to-peer exchange about common (mis)perceptions of EP/election with **Jennifer de Nijs**, Consultant at *League of Young Voters*; talked over dinner with **Nikos Chrysoloras**, EU correspondent for the Greek newspaper *Kathimerini*, about communicating Brussels in the Member States; and debated about effective online political communication and campaigning with **Jon Worth**, blogger and social media trainer.

The winners contributed actively to all the debates:

*"People are against the EU because they feel betrayed. Or do not care about it because Europe does not seem to care about the issues they have to go through" (**Georgios Ampatzidis**, Greece).*

*"Low turnout is about a lack of feeling European. Hence, there is the need to build an emotional connection with the European project and to inspire the new generation to believe in something grander than the nation-state" (**Edgaras Mascinskas**, Lithuania/UK).*

*"The question is how to demonstrate that civic engagement matters. Seeing and feeling the benefits from the EP can make people more interested in participating in elections" (**Stergios Mamalis**, Greece).*

- to present their ideas/projects at an exhibition organised in the framework of a high-level public event attended by more than 200 participants, entitled: *The European Parliament elections 2014 – Breaking the mould or more of the same?*, in which **Rebecca Harms** (Germany), Member of the European Parliament and Co-President of The Greens – Alliance for Free Europe, **Andrew Duff** (UK), Member of the European Parliament for the Alliance for Liberals and Democrats for Europe, **Rafal Trzaskowski** (Poland), Member of the European Parliament for the European People's Party, and **Janis A. Emmanouilidis** (Greece/Germany), Senior Policy Analyst and Head of Programme at the European Policy Centre, debated with participants about major challenges ahead of the 2014 EP elections. The event report can be found [here](#).

“The EPC is hosting the exhibition ‘The European Parliament – Why should I care?’ I think this is the first question we all need to ask ourselves” pointed out **Rafal Trzaskowski** (MEP) during the event.

Young people are the most enthusiastic and competent users of new technologies. They therefore have a valuable contribution to make not only in terms of proposing new ideas to improve the quality of democracy at EU level and to define a future vision for the European Union, but also in terms of further developing the online EU public space, and in helping to disseminate knowledge about the EP/EU in a faster, broader and more effective way than ever before.

- to interact and network with young people from other European countries, and to explore ways in which to build a platform for longer-term cooperation, across Europe, with the goal to create a buzz around the idea of being actively engaged in developing the European project, promoting a message along the lines: 'I will vote in the 2014 EP elections – What about you?'



At the EPC Policy Dialogue “The European Parliament elections 2014 – Breaking the mould or more of the same?”



Winners' exhibition at the EPC Policy Dialogue “The European Parliament elections 2014 – Breaking the mould or more of the same?”



Winners' dinner debate with Nikos Chrysoloras, EU correspondent for the Greek newspaper Kathimerini



Winners' meeting with MEPs in the European Parliament



Winners' workshop with Jon Worth, blogger and social media trainer



Speakers' panel at EPC Policy Dialogue “The European Parliament elections 2014 – Breaking the mould or more of the same?”

Messages from the winning entries

An international jury consisting of representatives from think tanks, media, a youth network, and the EP selected 20 successful entries from among all contributions. The winners were invited to Brussels in order to present their projects and discuss with like-minded young Europeans and EU decision makers about the EP, Europe and strategies for further cooperation and dissemination of their ideas. The successful entries include videos, essays, comics, logos, posters, a song, an online platform, a theatre play, a board game, digital art photography, and a fairy tale.

The EU needs to... speak facts relevant to us



Video "Be loud, be heard!"

This is the message of **Ivana Krajnc** (Slovenia, age 17) and her team to EU politicians and members of the European Parliament. In her video project, she argues: "The main idea is represented in these four words: **Be loud, be heard!** People do not participate because politicians no longer approach them with questions that have meaning. Instead, they use cliché statements like "You matter", but there is no debate on why I matter, and what I can personally do to live up to my responsibility."

A team project from Greece, represented by **Stergios Mamalis** (Greece, age 24), highlights the importance of breaking down abstract facts into concrete examples from everyday life. Their [comics illustration](#), entitled *The European Parliament - Working for you!*, depicts in images a story of what can happen if school pupils get the task to find out the roles of the European Parliament, and use that information in order to convince others to care.



Comic "The European Parliament - Working for you!"



Video project "Did you know that...?"

Catchy statements about what triggers the interest of young people in the EU and its Parliament are the topic of a [video project](#) entitled *Did you know that...?* by Team Douamico from Cyprus, represented by **Spiros Kotsomanidis** (age 16).

A British-Lithuanian team represented by **Edgaras Mascinskas** (age 23) created an online campaign for young voters entitled *I Vote for EU*. Their website www.ivotefor.eu includes video messages, texts and social media strategy with facebook, twitter and video profiles. "Protests and riots have become a common sight in European cities. If you are passionate about the future of Europe, then join the fight for Europe" – calls their website to other EU citizens.



Website www.ivotefor.eu

"Only Europe can have a bird's eye view and draw up an adequate budget to sustain the expansion into areas of education, culture, sports, employment, well-being, and the environment. That is why we care about the decisions taken by the European Parliament and that is why we need to vote in the 2014 EP elections" concludes a group [essay](#) submitted by **Ecole Européenne Bruxelles** based on a class project. Identity, belonging, education, information, culture, languages, travel, employment, wellbeing, aid to the third world, and the protection of our environment are the issues raised by these students, represented by **Selina Adedeji** (age 17).

The EU should ...use more imagery to address us

Participants made use of metaphors and allegories to illustrate how Europe and the EP can reach citizens more effectively. **Marina di Fiore** (Italy, age 20), for example, commented on her [comic](#): “This is just a simple metaphor, the European Parliament is the 'megaphone' with which every citizen – the 'main character' – can express his/her point of view to other European institutions – the 'crowd' – which are often perceived as far away and detached from reality on the ground. Voting is important to let our voices be heard” said Marina.



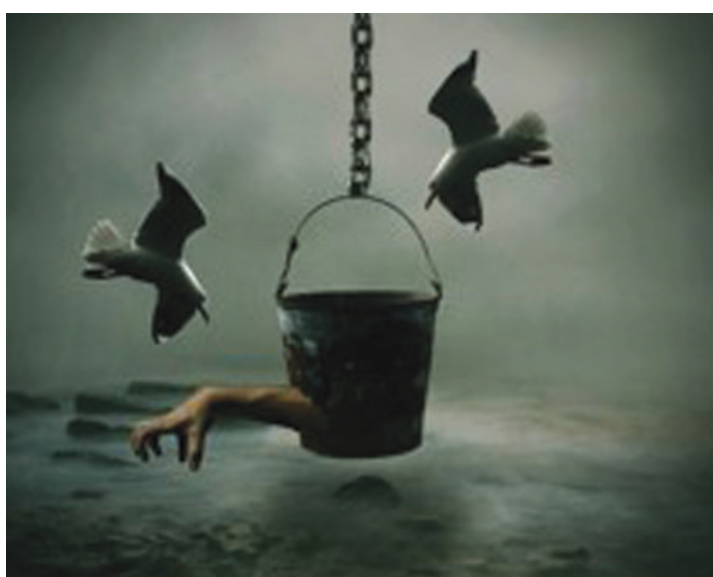
Comic “Megaphone”



Logo “It's about working together”

“We have the power to choose our own little 'worker' who will transmit our ideas and who will contribute on our behalf to the development of this European community in a way that we see fit...” This is the message depicted in a [logo](#) by a team of young people from Croatia, represented by **Antonija Niksic** (age 23).

“Freedom is the message that speaks to us!” – so believes **Elena Georgiou** (Cyprus, age 29). “From the three main roles of the European Parliament, I picked up two words: democracy and laws. Laws are related to one word: FREEDOM. Freedom is linked to everything. My photo represents all the people that have rights to freedom. People need those freedoms, they need to reach out and grasp their freedom rights...” Her thoughts are captured in [digital art photography](#).



Digital art photography “Freedom”



Video clip of song "With one voice I call Europe"

"With one voice I call Europe, I cry out: stand by me." An emotional message forms the basis of a winning [song](#) by a group of three young Cypriots represented by **Petros Tsanides** (age 16).

Georgios Ampatzidis (Greece, age 28) used a [fairy tale](#) to convey his message: "The *Members of Forest Meeting* is a children's story. It talks about how some forest animals decide to organise a meeting in order to discuss about issues they have or to make suggestions about the forest's wellbeing. The *Forest Meeting* is an allegory of the European Parliament and, through the animals' interaction, the reader learns about the role of the EP, its functions and its importance. I find allegories used in children stories very effective at communicating important meanings. Personally, I believe that children's stories are not only for kids but can also be an efficient way to promote ideas and thoughts to adults."

"We should not only sit and consume goods; we should do our best to change the situation and think in perspective for our children's children; can we do a favor to them as our grandparents have done for us in the past? This is how I try to influence the direction of the European Union. In my eyes, voting can be our small contribution not only to us, but to the following generations" – claims **Nadezhda Pancheva Tzocheva** (Bulgaria, age 22) in her [essay](#).

The EU should...become a more obvious part of citizens' daily lives



Poster "Still need a reason to vote?"

Important information should enter the public space on a daily basis. "Still need a reason to vote?" asks **Marisa Tosi** (Germany/Italy, age 21) in her [advertisement flyer](#), which provides many reasons why participation in elections matters, and encourages readers to literally take away her suggestions, in the same manner they would grab contact phone numbers from the bottom of a public advertisement.

Bruna da Costa Pedrosa (Portugal, 21) suggests that the EU should creatively 'enter' people's living rooms. She designed a [board game](#) which brings to the table various facts about the EP, in an attempt to combine fun with learning. Participants played it during the exhibition of the winning entries, in Brussels, on 10 July.



EP board game

Performing arts as a hobby can also help to spread concise messages, including with regards to the European Parliament. The **Kulturskolan Stockholm**, represented by **Amar Jasarevic** (Sweden, age 21), prepared a theater play for the competition, entitled *Take action! Why should we vote?* Their skit deals with issues of relevance to citizens, as well as with potential consequences of people's political inactivity. If you do not act, "Then who does?" asks rhetorically the Swedish drama group. "If you as a person do not take action, then you cannot expect others to do it for you. Taking action is not the responsibility of one person, it is everybody's duty!"



Trailer "Take action! Why should we vote?"

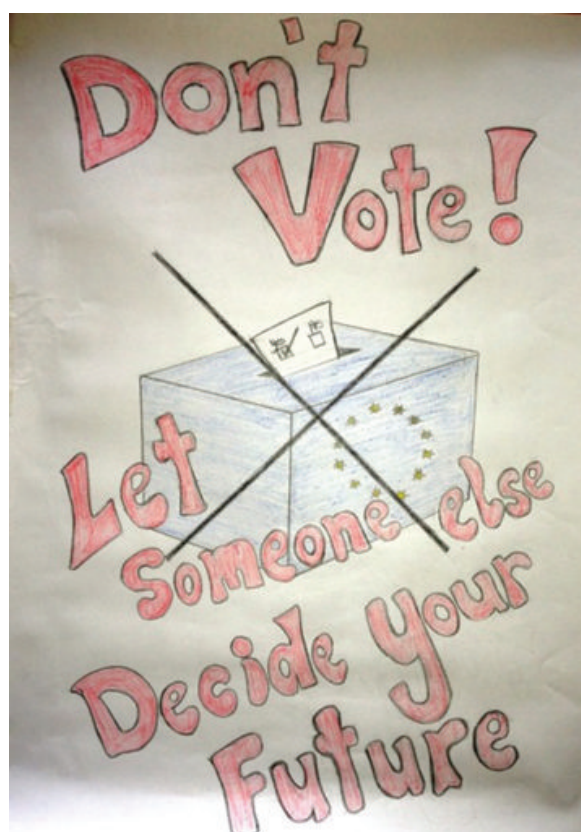
The EU should...use simpler language



Video "Not only vote"

[Not only vote](#) video is a message in motion, with a catchy rhythm, submitted by **Alicia Garcia Sierra** (Spain, age 17). In her opinion, using less fancy words and appealing more to values are crucial ingredients for communicating the importance of the upcoming EP elections to citizens.

"Don't Vote! Let someone else decide your future" is the provocation launched by **Ciana Curley** (Ireland, age 17) in a [poster](#) to other European fellows. Her idea is based on a simple observation that teenagers often do the exact opposite of what they are told. She is confident that reverse psychology can do the trick and boost turnout at the next EP elections.



Poster "Don't vote"

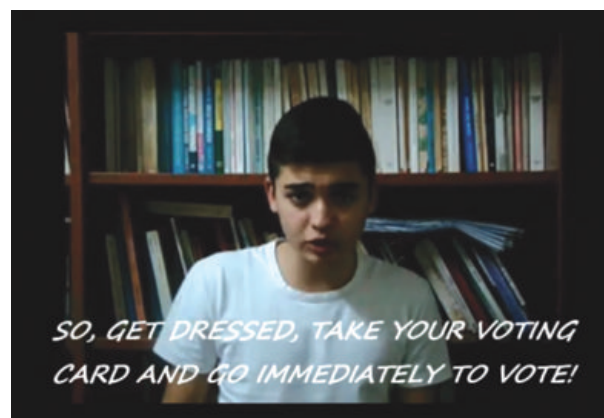
“Yes, why should I vote? I never thought about what that meant; for me, all this 'political mumbo-jumbo' seemed so far away, almost unreachable” – confesses **Esther Zitterl** (Austria, age 16) in her competition [essay](#). But then she explains: “What did change things was when we visited Strasbourg last December. It was simply amazing for me to see how the European Parliament works, not just in class but right in the heart of the European Union. We even had the chance to talk to the Austrian Othmar Karas, who is one of the Vice Presidents of the European Parliament....I think it's important for everybody to have an experience like that! To go and see for yourself how our laws are made, to speak to the politicians, be able to ask questions, and realise fully what all this 'political mumbo-jumbo' is about.”



“I care about who the members of the European Parliament representing Bulgaria are, and I know that changing Europe is changing me” explains **Teodora Koleva** (Bulgaria, age 27) in her video: [We are Europeans, but still not quite](#).

Video “We are Europeans, but still not quite”

To reach young people, Europe needs to address them in a more direct manner, and to offer them tangible incentives. “A youngster gets informed about the elections from the Internet. He ignores the article, but when he leaves a man who represents Europe appears on the laptop screen and explains why he should care...” is the description of the [video](#) by 'Europe for people team' from Cyprus, represented by **Panagiotis Neofytou** (age 16).



Video “Europe for people team”

“We cannot leave something as great as the process of European integration to fate, ill judgment or fear. This is why I am looking forward to the elections next year” – states decisively **Julian Kornprobst** (Austria, age 21) in a [speech](#) he wrote for the competition. He believes that the EU should work more on appealing to emotions and strengthening the linkage between citizens and the European Parliament.

Taking stock and looking forward

The winners evaluated their visit to Brussels as overwhelmingly positive in a survey organised at the end of their trip. Among the highest-rated aspects of their experience was the opportunity to meet and discuss with professionals working on EU affairs, as well as the chance to witness the European Parliament at work. Sitting in a session of the EP Committee on Education and Culture was assessed as “excellent” by 85% of the participants.

“Any social change begins with exposure” and “experience changes one's perspective completely” (Edgaras Mascinskas, Lithuania/UK).

A vast majority of the group also indicated that they would use the experience acquired in this competition in their future endeavours. Most of them found the exchange of different opinions and perspectives during the meetings

particularly valuable and enriching. Many stated that the trip to Brussels has motivated them to further encourage people in their Member State to care about European politics and to vote in the upcoming EP elections.

“I am now better equipped to argue with my friends based on what I have learnt from the other participants and this trip” (Julian Kornprobst, Austria).

One recurrent comment from the young winners was that they would like to see the EU institutions taking a more active interest in their opinions, and the European Parliament making greater efforts to engage young citizens and to listen to them.

“The European Parliament is uniquely placed to stay in touch with us and to form this emotional link” (Julian Kornprobst, Austria) and “people-to-people programmes can construct such an emotional bridge” (Esther Zitterl, Austria).

“There should be more opportunities to meet with MEPs and learn about how the EU institutions work” (Ivana Krajnc, Slovenia), “we do not learn enough about the EU in schools” (Ciana Curley, Ireland).

In the short run, the group plans to develop several concrete initiatives. The winning website www.ivotefor.eu will become a hub to showcase the successful entries and discuss ideas before and after the European elections. The group would like to integrate innovative ideas and concrete products in the website, and to use it as a basis for an online campaign in support of different messages. The overall objective is to “build a community” (Amar Jasarevic, Sweden) and “place the emphasis on being active” (Edgaras Mascinskis, Lithuania/UK).

More specifically, the plan is to convert several of the winning entries into comics so as to make them more accessible to young audiences. Participants also want to translate some of the winning contributions into other languages, where one can add 'national' reasons why it makes sense to go vote. Their intention is also to draw on existing networks (such as Erasmus Student Network), personal contacts and volunteering to go to schools in order to spread the 'news' about Europe, focusing on multipliers.

In the long run, the group talked about running a 'fact check' in the Member States, in order to challenge incorrect or incomplete points raised during the 2014 campaign for the EP elections. The idea behind this initiative is to expose and undermine the prevalent 'populist' rhetoric, whenever possible.

“People know factions but not the full story. Young people may have access to information but it is important to distinguish between being well informed and knowing/understanding” (Nadezhda Pancheva Tzocheva, Bulgaria). “The info available is often very complex and difficult to understand” (Edgaras Mascinskis, Lithuania/UK).

But the group agreed that communication was not only the responsibility of the EP/EU institutions; the media and national politicians also have an important role to play in 'translating' information and making the EU less of a faceless institution on the ground.

And equally important, they shared the opinion that each of them was responsible for trying to make a difference, no matter if great or small. To this end, the group stressed in particular the need to communicate with the marginalised people, and to attempt to involve those sceptical about participation in the elections by switching the rhetoric along the lines of 'Why should I *not* care?'

“EU needs to be seen in the 'suburbs', instead of only staying in the 'city centre'. EU officials need to be present in places where there are social problems, where people do not know about the EU and the Parliament” (Amar Jasarevic, Sweden). Information campaigns tend to be mostly preaching to the converted and fail to reach to the “people who do not feel like part of the system” (Ivana Krajnc, Slovenia).

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The sole responsibility for the content of this report lies with the European Policy Centre.

For more information about this project please contact the European Policy Centre at info@epc.eu