



Grassroots for Europe Round Table #43

Young Citizens Mobilising for Democracy in Europe

Tuesday February 6th, 2024

Summary Report

Background and aims.

June 2024 will see the first European parliament elections without the UK, something that saddens Grassroots for Europe and our partners in this Round Table. Our commitment to democracy is strong. The future of democracy depends on us and the creation and sustaining of an active and robust civil society. And that's where we all come in. Now more than ever, we need **#EUCivilSociety**.

This session of the Round Table is about young people's vision of the kind of democracy and society they want. It brings together campaigners and actors from UK and EU to discuss the **political engagement and voice of young people in Europe, as a key condition for the defence and flourishing of democracy in Europe** (and, in our own national context, for the reversal of Brexit.)

Young people in the UK overwhelmingly support rejoining the EU and reject the ideologies that promoted Brexit.

Young people across the EU overwhelmingly support the EU and wish to defend it against anti-democratic forces of the far right.

As we learned in our last RT session, young citizens were in the forefront of the recent historic election victory restoring democracy in Poland.

This RT was invited to look at ways the voices and votes of young citizens can advance our shared causes and push back against polarisation and autocratic regression, following on from our April 2023 session on “[Connecting young people to democracy and politics.](#)”



Klajdi Selimi, President of Young European Movement UK, chairing the meeting, commented that 2024 is the year of democracy: over 40 countries are participating in elections this year, including eight of the 10 largest countries in the world. This is a really important discussion, especially about maintaining democracy and about the direction we're heading towards in the future. This is why we've primarily got young people to speak because this is our future that we're talking about. We'll start with brief statements from our very strong panel of invited contributors, who will introduce themselves, and then take questions.



Christelle Savall, President, Young European Federalists (JEF): JEF are a pan-European organisation, with 10,000 members, present in 37 countries, including the EU, with the shared goal of world peace. JEF believe that the route to this goal is via

federalism, and a more united and democratic Europe, based on human rights and the rule of law.

There is a common misapprehension that young people do not want to participate, whereas, in fact, they do. Their involvement is evidenced, for example, by major demonstrations relating to climate change. It is vital to involve young people in the democratic process, in particular in voting. Setting the voting age at 16 is important, as is informing young people of the potential impact of their vote. With a view to the European elections, JEF ran a campaign called [EurHope](#). Young people were asked what changes they would like to see and what would make the EU better. The consultation received over 5000 suggestions and 1,5 million votes on the platform. As well as the climate crisis, young people are also interested in democracy and its institutions. In fact, of the proposals received, institutions form the topic of the greatest number. It is important to understand the impact institutions have on daily lives and how young people can make a difference through taking action. To achieve openness and action takes a lot of work on a daily basis. If they are armed with the right information, people are interested, and this is the role of institutions, and also of civil society.



Redi Asabella is a cultural mediator and community activist from Albania, recipient of the European Charlemagne Youth Prize in 2022 as part of the [Giufà project](#). The project is an initiative which promotes democracy, inclusion and well-being. It uses the arts as a means for young people to express themselves, make their voices heard and play an active role in society. The Giufà project was born from [Complete Freedom of Truth](#), an initiative started by Tina Ellen Lee (see below) some fifteen years ago. These initiatives aim to give people a voice and the opportunity to collaborate, promote ideas and build on existing structures through the creative

process. Democracy is of paramount importance, with participants being able to express themselves in a safe, creative and mutually beneficial environment.



As a board member of the Charlemagne Youth Prize alumni, Redi is part of a two-year-old initiative supporting activities and networking events with the aim of creating a synergic movement of young people interested in promoting European values. Having organised several events, the board is presently working to provide further opportunities for members and other groups. Last year saw the start of the [YEUF](#) (Youth Empowerment for Universal Franchise) project, aimed at the European elections. There are 15 NGOs organising events in all 27 member states promoting democracy and the importance of making the voice of young people heard. Before and after performances, the theatre company includes discussions and round tables facilitating freedom of expression and stressing the importance of activism. The aim is to inform young voters of what is at stake and raise awareness that the European Union is under both internal and external threat. The great example of Poland is evidence that it is possible to make positive and very tangible changes. The alumni are also working with organisations in Poland and Romania on a project called “Bridging the Bubble” which uses the artistic process to look at how communities work and how they can be more open and inclusive.

Tina Ellen Lee is artistic director of **Opera Circus**, an opera theatre company started in the early 90s which toured in Europe and other parts of the world with the aim of doing much more than sing and perform. **Opera Circus** worked in Bosnia in 2003 with the composer Nigel Osborne, who was working with children with trauma as a result of war, and commissioned an opera from him. When touring Bosnia in 2007, Tina Ellen Lee was invited to Srebrenica* and met young artists there who

* In an earlier release of the report, this was mistranscribed as 'Serbia'. [Editors]

were trying to develop a music theatre process with younger children in an attempt to unite their town. These young people between 14-17 years old were asked: "How can we be useful? What do you want to do?" The freedom to speak truthfully (Freedom of Truth) was developed informally, with up to hundreds of young people and artists from various countries using the arts to create spaces where people felt comfortable to discuss their situation. The sessions were always very inclusive, with a cross-section of different races and of disabilities or none. This project grew for over 15 years, with *Opera Circus* winning the Charlemagne youth prize for the UK in 2017. Tina Ellen Lee won the European Citizens Prize for work with young people across borders in the Western Balkans. All that work has been decimated in the UK by the loss of Erasmus, which the company is campaigning to restore as a more immediate possibility than rejoining the EU.

The many worldwide conversations with young people make it clear that these conversations have to be appropriately intergenerational to support those wanting to create change and restore democracy. Before speaking at seminars or conferences Tina Ellen Lee asks young people for their response to the questions to be asked. She then uses a small and appropriate selection. So, for example, being based in a rural environment in the South West of England means everyone has been devastated by our long-term right-wing political party. Lots of young people are in dreadful situations of mental health or poor education, or of not being educated at all.

The following is a precis of the responses. Young people are intensely aware of widespread apathy and a deep sense of hopelessness, and feel that participation in democracy or some other forms of activity is the only way to combat this mood in their own and future generations. Ongoing humanitarian crises, multi-generational conflicts and an ageing political class mean we are in danger of exacerbating these crises. Many young people feel that they do not have a future. Fear of widespread war and environmental disaster have robbed them of opportunities, and many joke that they won't live to see a better future. "So why should we try?" they ask. They recognise everybody wants to be part of something greater than themselves, but that desire has been lost through the narrow-minded policies of increasingly nationalistic

and xenophobic governments, who seem to be in a race to extract the last bits of wealth possible before everything finally collapses.

If we are to survive the next few decades, we must engage with and demonstrate a different model of civic and community life, give young people agency over their own futures and the chance to do better than preceding generations. The strongest feeling among the young is that current politics have no authenticity, there are no people they could or would vote for. Encouraging young people to vote is only meaningful if they have somebody worthwhile to vote for. We are at a tipping point, where over the next decade or so an old, corrupt generation of politicians will die out and space will be created for young people to take their places. We must do everything we can do to support that change. That's why **Opera Circus** is seeking funding for a series of democracy workshops using arts across the South West. Young people who have put mental health at the top of their list, particularly after COVID, need to be taken very seriously indeed.



Anna-Lena Lorenz, from Hildesheim in Germany, is an activist with Pulse of Europe, a citizen-based, non-political, non-partisan network of committed citizens with a shared belief in a united and democratic Europe as a means of promoting peace, freedom and prosperity. There are initiatives in more than 50 cities in Germany and in cities in other European countries, such as High Wycombe in Buckinghamshire. Voice of Europe is currently preparing a European election campaign focusing on young people who now have the vote from age 16. Recent demonstrations in Germany have shown the threat from anti-democratic parties, making it imperative to inform young people about the importance of using their vote.

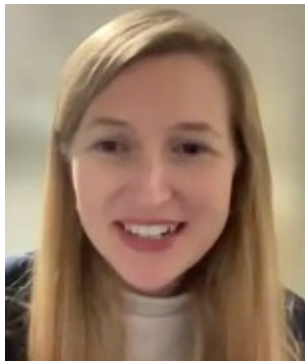


Anuschka Heid works in the international department of Würzburg local authority in Bavaria, and is responsible for international relations, especially town twinning. This work offers an inside perspective into local government and the role of democracy in local politics. Anuschka's role involves exchanges with diplomats and dignitaries from all over the world, especially from Würzburg's twin cities. Her main role is as project leader in the field of municipal development policy. That includes building wells in parts of Africa, but also a lot of youth projects, especially in Europe involving school exchanges between Würzburg and its twin towns. One recent (Erasmus +) project called "Let's Talk about Democracy" enabled travel between Sweden and Würzburg. In just a week 15- and 16-year olds not only discussed their values and thoughts about democracy, but also shared their ideas with the public by staging a play. All this despite the language barrier and different school systems.

Accessing funding is one of the main challenges in Anuschka's work, as is educating young people in the values of democracy. Liaising with international partners in order to promote democracy and international understanding is not a given in all municipal authorities, it's more like the icing on the cake. The main role of a city government is to issue passports, to provide bin collections, etc., but the most rewarding aspect of Anuschka's work is speaking to a lot of young people, including some who normally would not have the chance to meet other people from around the world and share their ideas.

Anuschka stressed that the main challenge to this aspect of her work is political volatility. Changes in the political complexion of a local government can completely alter a city's policies. At grassroots level, this could mean pupils no longer being able

to travel on school and city exchanges. A lot of valuable insights and experience about democracy would therefore be lost.



Lauren Mason. Originally from the UK, Lauren works in Brussels for the European Youth Forum, an umbrella platform of pan-European youth organisations including the Young European Federalists and the - still very active - British Youth Council. Amongst other initiatives, the European Youth Forum works with youth wings of European political parties, trying to persuade their mother parties to put younger candidates on their list for the European Parliament elections. Young people say that there are a lot of politicians who do not appeal to younger voters. Topics such as climate change, mental health, social exclusion, and poverty are important to young people but are not prioritised by political parties. The European Parliament elections in 2019 saw a relatively high youth turnout but still less than 50%. According to the European Parliament's own analysis, around 68% of young people said the reason they did not vote was practical rather than ideological. Impediments included being away from home, being abroad or at work, not knowing where or how to vote. Important to Youth Forum work is that voting is a habit and the sooner that habit is formed the better. Lowering the voting age to 16 is a positive move as not being able to vote until the age of 18 means that this coincides with the time when young people are the least settled, probably having moved away from home for the first time. The British Youth Council is advocating votes at 16 for UK elections. Voting comes at the end of a spectrum of political engagement, so what motivates young people to pay attention to politics in the first place? Involvement in other activities, for example Scouts, Guides, D of E, Young Farmers, or faith organisations can be the starting point. Since the European Commission declared 2022 as the

European Year of Youth, there have been a lot of extra activities involving young people. The Commission looked at the link between volunteering and political engagement. About 60% of young people are active as volunteers, members of a community, a society or sports club. There is a direct link between this type of involvement and an interest in politics, even if the activity is not itself political. The EU's awareness of this is a major driver behind the volunteering programme called the **European Solidarity Corps**. Regrettably, the UK is not able to participate in this. Alongside campaigning to rejoin Erasmus+ it would also be worthwhile campaigning to rejoin the European Solidarity Corps, which offers a host of opportunities for volunteering, including foreign exchanges. In its turn, this would have a positive effect on youth participation in democracy.



Simon Stracke (17) – High school student from Würzburg, Germany. Simon stresses the importance of personal experience, gained at a young age, in fostering participation in the democratic process. As a child, he accompanied his parents when they cast their vote. He observed voters and saw that they were smiling as they left the polling station. They knew that they had participated and that being part of the democratic system is a privilege. Voters were aware that in parts of the world controlled by dictators this is not possible. So, it is vital that young people are encouraged to vote as many are not currently using their ability to influence their country.



Seema Syeda - Comms and Campaigns Officer, Another Europe is Possible (AEIP). Another Europe is Possible is an alliance of radicals and progressives fighting the politics of Brexit. AEIP has a critical perspective on the EU, for example on its migration policy and some economic policies: however, given the dire position of the UK at present, AEIP speak with humility born of experience and knowledge. Seema is involved with [European Common Space for Alternatives](#), an initiative aiming to bring together different movements, including in the UK, across the continent. Ahead of the European elections, these movements will together consider how best to act on climate, migration, the rise of the far right and global issues of war and peace. The current situation of increased nationalism around the world is not working and we need to build alternatives. Seema also works for [European Alternatives](#), a pan-European organisation promoting democracy, culture and equality beyond the nation state. European Alternatives [has an online journal](#) and runs youth training events and programmes. There is [an exciting event in Marseille on April 26-28th](#) hosted by European Common Space for Alternatives, based on a simple premise: “To challenge the far right, we need a social, feminist, antiracist, ecological, peaceful and democratic Europe”. The event will be organised using a bottom-up approach, giving everyone the possibility to express themselves and to organise discussions and actions. Visit the site to register now. There is an excellent high speed train service from London to Marseille via Lille.



Myriam Zekagh – Youth Training Coordinator, European Alternatives.

Myriam is working on the youth movement and campaign [Accelerator](#), an educational programme which encourages motivated young people to overcome their feeling of despair through participation. Although opportunities do exist, awareness of these does not reach those groups of young people who actually need help, especially those in disenfranchised communities or marginalised areas. Myriam says she is from “a French no-go zone” and is herself fully aware of the challenges faced in accessing opportunities. **European Alternatives** was founded in the UK and a deep UK connection still remains. Myriam is also heavily involved in the new initiative **European Common Space for Alternatives**, creating a forum for building shared initiatives, such as combatting the weakening or repression of our rights. She closes with an invitation to anyone who wants to work with others on these issues to join this organisation.

Q and A.

Q: What are the main current barriers for young people to become involved in democracy and politics?

Christelle Savall: I think the main barriers to participation in democracy are, firstly, lack of civic education. This has an impact on young people, but then it's something that stays with people regardless of age. So there's an interest in investing in civic education at school, because it's something that will influence young people, both at the time and in their later life. Learning is of course possible throughout a citizen's

life, and this should be assisted as much as possible. But it's worth investing in educating the young.

JEF have practical experience of what works. It's effective to use a variety of channels, including peer-to-peer learning and learning outside the school setting. Young people may not spontaneously search for information but are happy and appreciative when it is provided and they are empowered to have an informed opinion on things.

Another major obstacle is that young people have limited access to political activity because they are not taken seriously and presumed to be less knowledgeable, less experienced and have had less time to develop their talents, though often their specific experience should make their contribution more relevant, not less. The end result of this is there is a shortage of younger political candidates in elections. There is also the problem of tokenism or 'youngbrushing', i.e. including young people (and even better, young women!) to tick a box and give an appearance of diversity.

Anna-Lena Lorenz. I agree and I think it's important that we give young people information they can trust. Young people look on TicToc or Instagram for information on politics and are prepared to trust what they get via those channels, but it's important they can access information that is helpful and real, not fake, and that it's about real politics, not just what passes as politics on social media.

Lauren Mason: There can also be practical obstacles for young people attending events, the timing of events, and in-person locations like a pub or bar where one will have to spend money to attend. Speaking time needs to be distributed fairly, not just putting young people on at the end, or speaking first but only as tokenism. Young people invited to speak should be encouraged to contribute on specific issues and where there is a clear connection to meaningful outcomes and action. Regarding social media, unfortunately parties of the right sometimes have more proficiency here, and pro-democratic parties may need to do more to develop their skills!

Redi Asabella: Young people are better able to contribute in ways they themselves find fulfilling and meaningful, which may not fit with formats of expert panel

discussion. They need to feel they are really being heard, not just used as decoration. But overcoming this challenge can lead to more creative approaches, for example by working through the media of arts and culture.



Philip Wohner: We recently had a discussion among school students about ways to get people more interested in our politics, especially in our generation, and that this is something that should be happening in school. So we are planning to invite some guest speakers, such as local politicians or community leaders, to talk about their experiences and perspectives. And we're planning mock elections, or simulations of elections, to make politics more engaging, and interactive. And I think, along with that, we are going to organise some informal discussions like this one we're doing right now. Debates on current political issues, during lunch breaks, or after school, to really get in contact, and apart from just studying our political system to really know what's going on and not just watch the television but talk about it at school, hear opinions and get talking.

Q: In terms of strengths and weaknesses, young people may not have the same legislative power as the other age cohorts. One thing we do have is the power of culture and arts and influence in this direction. Redi and Tina, what are your thoughts on how young people can utilise their strength within culture to influence politics?

Tina Ellen Lee: Everything coming to mind about this country right now is very negative and it's very hard watching this to actually think about the positive actions that can be taken. Our spaces and youth centres and music centres for young people, again, have been decimated across the country. So there's less and less

opportunity for young people to come together and make music and learn that they have power in their voices, in spaces which they feel they can trust and feel free to say what they think and what they believe.

But I think it's one of the most powerful ways. I'm very encouraged by Another Europe is Possible and some of these other organisations. And thinking about having these democratic conversations across the Southwest of England, thinking about using the arts much more, using film in particular, [we did a project in Bosnia a couple of years ago called IZAZOV!](#) "Izazov" is the Bosnian word for 'provoke' or 'challenge'. And we offered a training course to a small group of young Bosnians, who want to be filmmakers, for them to be able to say something that really mattered to them, to give them a voice to work on how they could become much more active in terms of what they wanted to do politically, in particular, but socially as well. I think it's one of the most important things you can do to get the voice across. But also for those of us that we have large networks, I think one of the most important things is to encourage people to start building their networks at the earliest possible opportunity. Because I think that's where they can get their message across and to join these kinds of organisations. But it's a very slow step by step process. One of the groups that we're working on is on the Isle of Portland in the South West of England, which is probably the most or second most deprived area in the whole of England. And it's also the place where the dreaded barge is, the Bibby Stockholm, the place where the poor young asylum-seeking men are being held. And as a result of a programme we did a couple of years ago on the island, a residency, where about 80 people came including around a dozen asylum seekers from multiple countries, their local young people started a youth council on the island. And some of the comments that they have said is: well, we've started our youth council, we now have a voice and we've actually made changes. So I think it's these kinds of opportunities that are going to develop and maybe not next year, maybe not in five years, but in 10 years time they are going to make a difference.



Shriya Bajpai - Head of Communications and Public Relations, YEM UK.

As someone who very involved in the creative side, because young people often feel disconnected and feel like the political sphere of decision making is inaccessible to them, when they look up at political bodies, and only see people aged 40 and over 50, and feeling the disconnect between the decisions they make and the experience they have. Art and culture are one thing where young people find refuge, find voice and find collaboration. That's the first place that they find collaboration. And it's very important for people to feel strong. And that strength is often derived from places of collaboration, which is why a lot of revolutions whether we go back to the US in the 70s whether we talk about the UK, even today, whether we talk about the crisis, on the war in Palestine, people are trying to speak through creative work. And I think it's really important that we try and introduce political discourse in artistic circles. Because art is inherently political, because politics is part of us.

Q: How can we bridge that intergenerational divide between young and older people? It seems like older people can offer a lot, particularly experience, knowledge and connection: what can young people do with this? How can that relationship work? How can we how can we make the most of that relationship?

Anoushka Heid: I think what's most important is that it's not all black and white. So there's not the older generation and the younger generation; there's shared ideas between generations and nations and whoever. And as it comes to participation, or getting the generations to talk, I think the only way you can actually do that is find a common platform, and that will most likely not be Tik Tok, because that tends to be

something more for the younger generations. But it would also not be discussions where you invite people to sit in a in a university building and have a one hour lecture. So it has to be something social in between. Getting people to find a common ground, having events, getting people to talk to each other, on a very low level, easy entry basis. That is partly the task of activists like that you, to establish platforms where exchange can happen. But I also see that as a responsibility of politicians, our local communities to create actual spaces for encounters. And I think the easiest way is to get everyone around the same table, figuratively speaking, in this case, of course, to share their ideas and to see that there is not, as I mentioned earlier, black and white, but there is a common ground that most of us actually share.



Jo Pye: What is missing from politics is compassion and empathy. And a feeling that we are all one human race that have got to face so many different challenges. If we don't invest in our young people, and we don't make them feel that they have a future, we as older people will not have a future because why should they look after us if we've been so pitiful towards them?



Richard Harris: there is a tremendous need for much greater sharing of experience between the old and the young. In a way, it's a cross-mentoring. There's the experience to be shared by the older people. And there's the impacts of the new

technologies, and the new ways of communication, which older people need to understand.

Tamsin Shasha: On the subject of campaigns that really have ignited young people and get them politically motivated, the campaigns that have really involved young people have been Extinction Rebellion and Black Lives Matter.

Whereas it's always been a conversation in pro-European organisations about how we get young people on those marches, because overall, they're not really there, they're absent. That's something that we need to grapple with in terms of using art. How do we use art to engage and without it being preachy, with it being a resource, something that is entertaining without young people feeling that they're being force-fed by an older generation, who have already lied to them, who've already caused climate change, who've already subjugated people and who've already oppressed people with their colonialism? I just saw a show called *Truth's a Dog Must to Kennel* by Tim Crouch, it's not overtly political, but it is very deeply political. I tried to do it with my show, to make theatre in a way I don't want to say sexy, but something that is that, that ignites people's interest by having identifiable role models, that people can understand, that people recognise, younger people who are already, like Madeleine, politically motivated themselves, can then bring in more people, more young people. And also the question is, how can we use digital? You must be aware that Arts Council funding has been decimated, sometimes 100% has gone in local council funding. Melvyn Bragg spoke in the House of Lords about it. So we have to mobilise little is left of theatre to use it to ignite people and to inspire people.



Jane Morrice: This has been an absolutely wonderful and heartwarming discussion so far. It's it really has lifted my spirits, although spirits are lifting here in Northern Ireland as a result of renewed political activity, which is good. The conversations we're having about youth here, remind me so much of the conversations we had about women back in the 90s, in Northern Ireland, and we set up our own political party called the Northern Women's Coalition, which I understand is still the only women's party in the world that has got elected representatives. One thing we noticed when we were campaigning for women to get into the peace talks, was that when men started backing us, we knew we had a very good chance. So why not get th older generation and the young together to back a campaign for reducing the voting age. f the older genelration started saying we want 16 year olds to vote, that does lend weight to it. Obviously, we want to make sure the 16 year old wants to do it. I wish we had hundreds more people here listening in. My three points would be: number one reducing the voting age, and having a serious campaign to get civic education included in that, because if you're going to do that, you're going to have to bring education about voting into the schools. Secondly, digital voting. If everything's going digital, why not digital voting that will allow the voting systems that someone said are currently blocked logistically, but that digital voting would allow. And my third one is compulsory voting. With all three, you've got young people changing the world.



Tim Geiger, Würzburg. Hello, I'm Tim from Germany. I'm 18 years old. I asked myself the question, how is it that we young people in Germany and other European countries actually get into politics? It can happen through various pathways, or it may not happen at all, often it's quite random. Having news services designed for children or young people could be a good idea: information from trusted sources and less reliance on the social media. I think this would really help. Of course this is not the only way we usually get into politics because now there are also a lot of demonstrations out there. And more and more people, especially teenagers like me, are getting involved in them. Like, for example, the demonstration against the AfD Party last Friday and Saturday in Würzburg, where we were over 10,000 people, and there were lots of college and school students there. And this was very, very hopeful for me. And yes, it was very nice to see that so many people still feel part of democracy and are still moved to stand for democracy.



Jennifer Monahan. I formed with other people (several of whom are here) the **Erasmus Plus Alliance** which is older people who are professionals of all types, teachers, universities, and alumni who have worked in Erasmus, some over their whole careers, who seek to contribute and support YEM as providers of information,

practical thinking, and contacts as far as we're able. And it's, in my opinion, a really happy relationship of mutual respect and trust, which needs building. The other point I'd like to add, following on from Jane's contribution from Northern Ireland, is that I think it is Finland where schoolchildren now have training in how to deal with false information on all the social media. Compared to ours, their education system is extremely advanced. And from a very, very young age, they tell kids how to be aware, where to look and where to look out, who you can trust and what you can trust. And I would like to add that to the list of things to be done.

Q: What gets young people focussed and interested in politics, not just politics, but European politics?

Lauren Mason: We had a similar conversation in the office this week with our communications colleagues, and I can tell you that from the metrics of our communications data, Erasmus+ is the biggest thing that gets in people interested in politics in terms of opportunities. So you know, when we post something about Erasmus, the numbers of impressions and shares go through the roof compared to any other topic. Of course, Erasmus+ is just a name, but what stands behind it? It's sad to be talking about this in a setting where people who largely don't have access to it anymore from the UK, but it is opportunities, it's a chance to meet people from other cultures and as somebody mentioned in the chat, learning other languages, encountering other cultures is hugely important for creating empathy and interest both in other cultures and in what's been decided at a European level. It's fun - I think we also have to remember that young people also want to do things that are fun, like a lot of reasons why we get into politics, it might be because it was a chance to meet people, a chance to learn new things, drink a beer, whatever. So I think what Erasmus offers is the promise of foreign exchange, learning new things, meeting new people. And at least if I think about my own path, how I got interested in European politics was just learning foreign languages and meeting other people and realising that they face similar challenges to what I faced and thinking that it might be nice to try and find common solutions.

Anuschka Heid: When I was younger, I was doing Erasmus programmes, and youth exchange and so on, and that's when I realised that the things I took for granted are actually not things that have been there for ever. So like, being able to travel wherever I want within Europe, being able to just go live abroad for a while, when I was young. At first, I thought, okay, that's just what I could do. Until I learned that even like one generation previously, my parents did not have these opportunities. And I think, emphasising this and showing people that getting involved or getting together, working together as the European Union does make a change and does provide actual advantages for each and every single individual. I think that's what gets people motivated and interested in politics and interested to participate.

Anna-Lena Lorenz: The main problem in Pulse of Europe is that there are not so many committed young people who are in the movement. They are people in the age cohort of Chris and Miryam, I think, but in my age cohort, we are the only local team aged from 23 to 26. But I agree with Anuschka and Lauren. And I think it's having experiences in other countries, learning about the politics of each country, learning the culture, the food, how other people think about their own country, I think this is the best thing young people can do to get engaged in European political activity.

Myriam Zekagh: Continuing the earlier point in our discussion about common issues and common platforms, the European Common Space for Alternatives, which Seema and I have mentioned here, could be an interesting platform to discuss issues we share regardless of our age or location, as long as we want alternatives for Europe, whether at the local, national, regional, supranational level, and with people situating themselves differently in those respective spaces. You have the very visible farmers' mobilisations in France, while in Germany there are younger farmers, who are not at the moment very broadly mobilised or engaged. One also needs to say that being young isn't in itself necessarily a good thing. When we look at the French Prime Minister, I wouldn't look at age as the be-all and end-all of how and why we are getting young people into politics, we also need to look at what they have in their brains and what future and alternatives that they want to promote. So this is why focusing on the issue rather than on age is the most important thing to get

people motivated in those transnational spaces.



Tamsin Shasha: It feel that Erasmus was not well or sufficiently promoted within the UK while we were in the EU, and UK pro-Europeans were not sufficiently aware of its value and importance. If we rejoin, this will need to be done much more actively and effectively.



Juliet Lodge: I am a co-editor of a forthcoming trans-European co-authored volume coinciding with the European elections, and we would very much welcome contributions from groups represented here. I'd also like to ask how UK pro-Europeans can help our European friends in the coming EU elections: maybe mobilising non-Brits in the UK who can vote in European elections? What is it that you think we could best do to support your campaigns in the short to medium term?



Chris Hammond: I was present at the public protest against AfD in Würzburg, where I met Tim. I can confirm that the demonstrations were cross-generational, including multiple generations of the same families, and with placards saying 'Grannies against AfD [Omas gegen AfD]'. The young were certainly present and active, and maybe this relates to the postwar German practice of schooling in democracy which starts as early as the age of four. In England there is not much civic education, which is maybe one reason why we have much political apathy. See the illustrated report by Magdalena Williams:

<https://kentandsurreybylines.co.uk/politics/democracy/democracy-in-action-mass-protests-against-afd-across-germany/>



Peter Corr: We have talked a lot about Erasmus, and I understand why. But we may be in danger of narrowing the young audience we're speaking to by just talking about Erasmus all the time. According to Google there were 2.8 million university students in the UK and 15,000 of them took part in Erasmus, when we were still in it. That's 0.5% of university students, and obviously not all young people go to university. I worry sometimes that if we just concentrate on one thing such as Erasmus, we're missing most people. And that's why I like I love ideas of bringing art into it. Loving or hating Jeremy Corbyn got lots of young people involved. And he did

that among other things through street music and, and stuff that most people relate to whether they're at university or not, when they are that age. I think we need to look at things like that. I think it was called #Grime4Corbyn or something like that. If we could get #Grime4Europe, that'd be amazing. I totally support Erasmus, and I will always support any initiative like that. But I do worry sometimes that we talk about what is a niche thing for most people. I think if you asked 10 young people on the street, what Erasmus was, I don't know what percentage of them would say they even know what it is. Perhaps awareness of Erasmus itself needs to be pushed in universities. But I do think that we need to think of other things as well, that have nothing to do with even education really, and arts and music is a really good way to do that, I think.

Chair: Absolutely valid point. Thank you everyone for your great work. I'll invite our speakers to close by giving, if they would like, some final brief information on a current initiative, and share some links via the chat.

Christelle Savall. I mentioned our campaign for the European elections, there is also our campaign [Democracy under Pressure](#) which we've been running since 2006, which aims to raise awareness about threats to the rule of law across Europe, inside and also outside the EU, about where it's happening, and about how we as citizens can take care of democracy for future generations.. See the site for more: the next action week starts on **18 March 2024**.

Redi Asabella: The idea of the [YEUF \(Youth Empowerment Universal Franchise\)](#) project is combining the work that different associations around Europe do within the framework of the European elections. We also support [together.eu](#), which is a platform that has been promoted by the European Parliament which showcases projects that are of interest of young people as well as others. Anyone can sign up to the platform and they can get relevant newsletters for their area and topics of interest that can point them to relevant events, not only related to politics, but also culture and the arts. As has been said, we aim to diversify the coverage so as to include as many young people as we can. Regarding the point that was made just now about

the Erasmus programme, I just want to point out that the Erasmus programme is not only about university students, so it's open to every young person that wants to participate in it. Obviously, the exchanges in that case may be of shorter duration but they provide, in my opinion, a very important way of knowing other cultures and being in contact with other people from other countries for an extended period of time, gaining a new perspective, and getting young people to know other cultures and practice other languages other than English, which is obviously a lingua franca, giving the opportunity to practice more than one language.

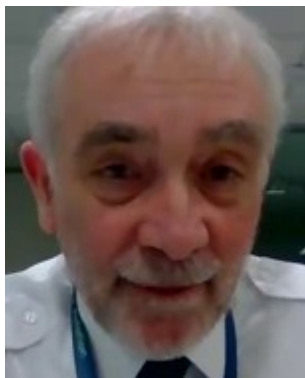
Tina Ellen Lee: Apart from developing ideas around democracy, using arts and culture, I'm going to Warsaw tomorrow to pull together an initiative that is linking some UK and Ukrainian universities with artists to develop an online training programme, which has to do with using the creative arts to develop trauma-informed care practice, and pedagogy in war. And one of my purposes is to get young people involved, because it will eventually be, I hope, available online, for everybody. And as we have a mental health pandemic in the world at the moment with a huge amount of trauma, including in the UK, I'm really interested in seeing how that develops.

Anna-Lena Lorenz : I think the most important thing is to show young people how important it is to go and vote, and how important it is to have good democracy in every country in Europe, not only in Germany, or in the United Kingdom. Secondly, I think you know here how it is with borders, with many restrictions in the United Kingdom. And I don't want to have that in Germany too. Maybe It would be a good thing to tell more people how it is now in the UK.

Lauren Mason: Three things. One, somebody asked if there's something really concrete and easy you can do quickly: we have [a petition open to lower the voting age](#) to 16. I dropped the link in the chat, please sign it and and share it with your friends, contacts, etc. The second thing, please take your kids or grandkids with you to the ballot, even if they can't vote, it's good for them to see what voting looks like and how it works. Most voting stations will let you take them at least into the room to see what it looks like. Third, the European Parliament organises every two years

something called the [European Youth Event](#), which is a very big festival style event in Strasbourg. The next one is not until next summer 2025, but if you're planning and budgeting ahead in your associations and organisations for 2025 it's still open to young people from the UK, maybe you could consider helping to support their travel to Strasbourg, so that they could be part of that.

Myriam Zekagh: Seema and I have spoken about the Space for Alternatives, which is all about the issues that bring us together in Europe. Please [register for our newsletter](#). We are involved with the [YEUF programme](#). I'm also very interested in sending some of these awesome young people who are leading actions throughout Europe, including some of them in the UK, to the AI forum. Lauren, thank you so much for the update.



Phil Lucas [Dorset for Europe]. Alongside Erasmus there are other pan-European programmes open to third countries which the UK chose unnecessarily to leave at the time of Brexit. One of these exits similarly affects young people's educational and career prospects was from the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) under which UK trainee airline pilots could qualify for a Pan-European pilot's license. Now, if they want to work in Europe they need to study for a double qualification and take 26 exams instead of 13. So it would be good to see a wider cluster of campaigns to recover opportunities for young people across industries, part of which would be a call to rejoin EASA.



Colin Gordon: A big thank you to everyone from the organising team. Our next RT session on March 5th will be addressing a closely related topic of interest to all of us here – how to combat the far-right political threat at elections this year across the UK and in Europe. We'll be sharing more info on this shortly as well as the report and contacts from this event.

Attendees

Chair

Klajdi Selimi, YEM UK President

Speakers

Redi Asabella, The Giufà Project
Tim Geiger, young citizen, Würzburg
Anuschka Heid, Stadt Würzburg
Tina Ellen Lee, Opera Circus
Anna-Lena Lorenz, Pulse of Europe Hildesheim
Lauren Mason, European Youth Forum
Christelle Savall, JEF
Simon Stracke, young citizen, Würzburg
Seema Syeda, Another Europe Is Possible
Philip Wohner, young citizen, Würzburg

Shriya Bajpai, YEM UK
Peter Burke, Oxford for Europe
Peter Corr, NRM
Mark English, European Movement UK
John Gaskell, GfE Chair
Jane Golding, British in Europe
Andrew Hesselden, Save Freedom of Movement
Chris Hammond, East Kent4EU
Mirjam König, Pulse of Europe, High Wycombe
Annette Kratz, Erasmus+ Alliance
Else Kvist, New Europeans UK

Christine Lester, Erasmus+ Alliance
Phil Lucas, Dorset for Europe
Stella Mavropoulou, YEM UK
Jennifer Monahan, Erasmus+ Alliance
Jane Morrice, Grassroots for Europe
Richard Morris, European Movement UK
Tamsin Shasha, Festival of Europe
R A Watt, Glasgow Loves EU
Kate Willoughby, #Emilymatters
Richard Wilson, European Movement UK
Sue Wilson, Bremain in Spain
Myriam Zekagh, European Alternatives

Grassroots for Europe RT Team

Colin Gordon
Helen Grogan
Jonathan Harris
Dr Monica Horten
Caroline Kuipers
Juliet Lodge [session co-ordinator]
Lilian McCobb
Tony McCobb
Jo Pye
Magdalena Williams

Apologies

Fiona Godfrey, British in Europe
Madeleina Kay

Next Meeting: Tuesday March 5th 2024, 5pm – 6:30pm GMT

Contacts, news, info, events.

Person	Organisation /role	Contact	URL	Event / campaign notes
Seema Syeda	Another Europe is Possible	seema@anotherurope.org	https://spaceforalternatives.eu/ European Common Space for Alternatives https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/think-global-act-global-internationalism-for-new-times-tickets-811277521907	Marseille, April 26-28 2024 Would also like to share an event - think global act global - that Another Europe is organising on 23 March 2024
Klajdi Selimi	YEM UK - President		www.yem.org.uk/embrace-erasmus/	Embrace Erasmus+ campaign
Myriam Zekagh	European Alternatives	comms@yem.org.uk @myriamzek	https://spaceforalternatives.eu/	
Mark English			https://www.europeanmovement.co.uk/face-the-music	European Movement UK 'Face the Music' campaign
Andrew Hesselden	Save Freedom of Movement - Campaign Director	@Andrew@saveFOM @andrewhesselden savefom@andrewhesselden.com		https://yorkshirebylines.co.uk/news/brexit/mutual-free-movement-for-uk-and-eu-citizens-supported-by-up-to-84-of-brits-in-stunning-new-poll/
Tina Ellen Lee	Opera Circus		https://operacircusuk.com https://euyouth2024.be http://thecompletefreedomoftruth.com https://vimeo.com/857397718 https://www.changingthestory.leeds.ac.uk	A film we commissioned with interviews with 26 young people over 2 years from 16 different countries...getting their voices across We were part of this project over 4 years and although it wasn't perfect very many youth led political projects
Kate			https://www.parismatch.com/actu/inter	#Emilymatters

Willoughby			national/insolite-une-suffragette-appelle-les-habitants-voter-dans-les-rues-de-londres-234314	
Richard Wilson	EM-UK – Vice-chair. Leeds for Europe		https://www.tickettailor.com/events/leedsforeurope/1137090/r/grassrootsforeurope [Sat 17 Feb 2024]	Leeds for Europe are proud to join with Young European Movement UK to present a public meeting exploring the Erasmus+ scheme and what participation would mean for the young people in the UK.
Tamsin Shasha	Festival of Europe	tamsin@festivalofeurope.uk richard@festivalofeurope.uk	https://festivalofeurope.uk/	
Lauren Mason			https://byc2016.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Current-BYC-members-list-last-updated-Jan-2024.pdf https://youth.europa.eu/discovereu_en https://www.youthforum.org/topics/be-seen-be-heard https://aviageneration.eu/en/	The British Youth Council have a list of youth councils across the country Discover EU, offers a free Interrail pass to young people through a competition The Youth Forum has a petition open to lower the voting age to 16. This project AVIA tells the story of Europe through interviews with grandmothers and granddaughters
Shriya Bajpai	YEM UK	comms@yem.org.uk		
				Information about the Interrail-Ticket: Travel through Europe by Train 33 Countries with 1 Rail Pass : interrail.eu

Christelle Savall	JEF		Democracy Under Pressure	https://jef.eu/campaign/democracy-under-pressure/ JEF.eu/dup
Jane Golding	British in Europe			Overseas elector applications to register since any British citizen who has been registered or lived in the UK was re-enfranchised. Since 1 January over 31k UK overseas electors have already applied to register.
Peter Corr	National March for Rejoin		https://www.marchforrejoin.co.uk	

