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Campaigning for Europe

8 & 9/11/2018, Brussels

Opening Session of the 9th European Public Communication Conference 8 November Hemicycle of the European Parliament

Welcoming remarks: Sylvie Guillaume, Vice-President of the European Parliament

Speakers: Stephan Petermann (architect and leader of EuroLab at the Forum on European Culture), Soundous Boualam (founder of @HumansoftheEU), Danijela Svircic (social media ambassador for the "This time I'm voting" campaign), Professor Dr Claes de Vreese (professor of political communication at the University of Amsterdam), Dr Susana del Rio (political scientist and member of the Committee of Independent Experts of the European Commission in "Democracy in a supranational context, EU Communication, Citizens, Governance")

First results of the Flash Eurobarometer "Public opinion in the EU regions": Emmanuel Rivière (CEO of Kantar Public, France)

Moderator: Florence Ranson (founder REDComms)

The opening session of the 9th edition of EuroPCom took place in the Hemicycle of the European Parliament, kicking off with inspiring stories and personal experiences on the topic of campaigning for Europe. The speakers approached the topic from the perspective of both the broad and narrow senses of "campaigning", in particular with regard to the upcoming 2019 European Parliament elections, giving an outsiders' take on how to ensure creativity and get people involved in European projects. Contributions from academic experts and from the audience added to the debate.

Introduction and opening remarks

The moderator **Florence Ranson** welcomed the audience, both those present in the hemicycle of the European Parliament and those watching on web streaming, introducing the topic of both the session and the conference in general: "Campaigning for Europe".

Ms Ranson listed several challenges the EU is facing ahead of the elections, such as the rise of Euroscepticism and political and economic challenges. She said she hoped to see interactive debates during the two-day conference. She encouraged the audience to think and reflect, but also to criticise when necessary.



Campaigning for Europe can have different meanings and approaches, but the goal is the same: to get European citizens interested and involved in European politics.

Sylvie Guillaume, Vice-President for information policy, press and citizens at the European Parliament, then gave a welcoming statement, focusing on the upcoming elections and the vision of Europe. The elections are taking place at a time when anti-European populists are stronger than ever in Europe. Ms Guillaume admitted that Europe had its failings, but she also pointed out that the reality is far from how it is sometimes described in fake news. She said she hoped we would all become better at talking about what Europe does well and showing that it matters, adding that the European Parliament works day in, day out to adopt legislation for the benefit of citizens. Another challenge Ms Guillaume talked about was how to mobilise young people. The EU does a lot in areas that count for young people, such as combatting climate change and tax evasion, but Europe is often reduced to a technical or academic discussion, with the result that the media doesn't always pick up on the practical aspects of what the EU does. Ms Guillaume said she hoped we could move on from the vision of Europe as something old and dusty, and asked the audience for their input on tailoring messages to different groups of people, to get a high voter turnout in the upcoming elections.

Audience poll and Eurobarometer results

Ms Ranson then did a straw poll on Slido, asking the audience where they came from and what sector they worked in. Most of the audience lived in Belgium, worked in an EU institution or regional or local administrative body, were taking part in EuroPCom for the first time, and campaigned for Europe at work, on social media, in the media or among friends.

A short presentation followed, of the latest [Eurobarometer survey on public opinion in the EU regions](#), by **Emmanuel Rivière**, CEO of Kantar Public in France. Mr Rivière considers this survey exceptional, because it was carried out in 204 NUTS 2 regions, throughout the EU, to gauge the views of almost 62 000 Europeans on a range of issues. They included trust in the EU and regional national government; quality of life and optimism about the future of the regions; the regions' economy; the main issues facing the regions and political representation. The results put trust in the EU higher (59%) than trust in regional national governments (42%). When asked who was best placed to explain the EU, 25% of respondents said the regional or local representatives were best placed to do so, while 20% said national representatives were best placed to do.

Panel debate

The opening session continued with short statements by the five main speakers, who are involved in campaigning for Europe in different ways, working outside the EU institutions.

The first speaker was **Stephan Petermann**, architect and co-organiser of Eurolab at Forum on European Culture in the Netherlands. He talked about how culture, such as art, literature and design, can support the communication on Europe, mentioning products like videos, animations and t-shirts, but also by asking cultural influencers, musicians and soccer players to promote Europe. The objective, according to Petermann, is to show that Europe is connected and cannot be broken and that Europe is not an elitist project, but for everyone.

Next up was **Soundous Boualam**, founder of the "Humans of the EU" photo blog, accessible on various social media networks. Through photos and personal stories, Boualam pays tribute to people who are campaigning

for Europe, no matter who they are or what level they're at. Different though each personal story is, they all have something in common, Boualam said.

Danijela Svircic, ambassador for the "This time I'm voting" campaign, was the next speaker. She said that the campaign's aim was to spread information about the European Parliament and Europe in general. She said she had noticed that a lot of people were not well informed about what the EU had done for them. Her goal is to motivate people to become active citizens and to make voting trendy, by getting people to be active on social media and take part in panel discussions.

Claes de Vreese, professor at the University of Amsterdam, approached the topic of campaigning for Europe from an academic point of view. He made three points worth bearing in mind in the upcoming elections. Firstly, we should embrace conflict, since it offers choices and creates more debate and news coverage. Secondly, we should talk to the majority and take them seriously. The challenge is to not target only people with extreme views, but also the 70-80% who make up the majority, and have very nuanced views. Thirdly, we need to understand how social media and legacy media are intertwined, instead of focusing on only one of them.

Last, but not least, was **Susana del Rio**, doctor in political sciences and member of the Committee of Independent Experts of the European Commission on citizens and governance, in Spain. She believes that campaigning for Europe is everyone's responsibility, not just politicians'. She thinks the 2019 European Parliament elections will be a turning point. The EU has many pressing concerns, such as migration, climate change and Brexit, but campaigning for Europe is also about renewing and revitalising the EU. We need Europe, but Europe also needs its citizens, she concluded.

Debate with the audience

After the speakers had finished, the discussion was opened to the audience for questions and remarks. Some questions related to the introductory statements, such as the effectiveness of using celebrities when campaigning for Europe. There was a question about whether conflict really is something to embrace. Other questions related to the difficulties of reaching not only the urban population, but also people outside cities, or not only the regions in mainland Europe, but also those not on the mainland. The speakers' main message was that there was no one-size-fits-all solution.

The moderator closes the session with the final recommendation: "**Celebrities and new techniques can help spread the word, but in the end, campaigning for Europe is everyone's business, and we can all chip in!**"