



**EuroPCom 2015**  
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**Preaching or teaching: educational communication tools**

The workshop was chaired by **Eleonora Di Nicolantonio**, head of unit in the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) Communication Department, who opened the discussion on the challenges of engaging young people in European politics today. Politics is invariably perceived as too difficult for young people and as distant from them and their needs. Alternative educational tools and communication channels are vital to overcoming the communication deficit, lack of solidarity and young people's lack of interest in the European Union. The EESC represents organised civil society and is therefore necessarily involved with various youth organisations. In order to raise awareness among young people, the EESC organised the youth plenary event "Your Europe, Your Say" again this year. Students from 28 schools (one from each Member State) were selected at random and invited to debate on topical issues; this year the focus was on migration. The youth plenary aims to put in place a dialogue and goes local in order to engage young people on topics that directly affect them. The European Citizens' Initiative is also an important way for young people to engage in direct democracy and decision-making, for it allows one million EU citizens to participate in shaping EU policies by calling on the European Commission to make a legislative proposal.

Moreover, the EESC has developed an "edutainment" project with the interactive game "R EU ready?" The app allows players to campaign for policies, influence others, answer questions and learn more about the EESC's role as one of the EU institutions in both a fun and challenging way.

**Lovisa Aldrin** from Europe Direct Halmstad, Sweden, shared her teaching experiences and projects in the Swedish context, where it is a legal requirement to teach how the EU works at high school. However, the problem frequently encountered is that Swedish young people have been born into the EU and take a borderless Europe for granted. Furthermore, the teachers responsible for education on the EU are often not familiar themselves with its workings. Nevertheless, **Ms Aldrin** pointed out that you must make the EU your own and that it would be a serious blow for democracy and any government's credibility if the younger generation were to be disengaged. Ideally one should learn about one's rights at school age in order to make use of direct democracy. Furthermore, the key role of schools in spreading knowledge is acknowledged; therefore it is necessary and useful to work with them directly.

For instance, Europe Direct simulates a model EU/UN in which every participant has to act their role, be it a moderate centre-left politician or a right-wing populist. The principle of this teaching method is that you learn better by doing rather than passively listening and being lectured to. In this workshop the classes are selected at random and get to represent a country, but not their own. The students therefore have to research countries and political scenarios other than those in Sweden and so are more likely to learn something new during



this exercise. Each class is sub-divided into political parties and interest groups which the students must represent and argue for. A jury monitors the participants' performance and decides on the winner. The project is increasingly popular and has proven to be a considerable success, with 89% saying they loved it and 81% claiming they learned something new in feedback reports.

**Wolfgang Traussnig** from Europe Direct Lower Austria talked about his experience creating dozens of fun and creative workshops on the EU for children. The outreach project EU-Kids Day also operates on a large scale with many international partners and sponsors. Indeed, in order to engage young people, some celebrities have volunteered to present the workshops, such as Austrian actor and politician Mercedes Echerer, thereby helping to create connections and give politics a human face. At these events information stands for each country are set up and children attend presentations and take part in discussions. This might include debating social issues in which two classes must compete by arguing for a particular position.

The overall aim is to provide children with a positive experience of Europe and for this feeling to spread by word of mouth within schools and family circles. The programme is therefore packed with fun activities such as the EU wheel of fortune, geography quizzes, a European food fair, indoor sledging and playing on the air soccer table. There is a closing ceremony with balloons and a yearbook is made about the young people's experiences in order to reinforce a sense of solidarity.

Cinematographer **Benjamin Sylvand** is involved in designing game projects and courses on EU geopolitics that have the branding of Sciences Po University in Paris. There is a range of quizzes and simulation games, such as the simulation of an international conference on the environment. The six games are sorted by topic, such as secession or migration, and in each game the participant takes on a particular role. Decisions have to be made and each choice made has to be plausible in the context, although these contexts and the information provided are incomplete. There are no right or wrong choices or answers as such and therefore no final grade, but players receive feedback at the end to help them make better decisions. This approach to pedagogy can be described as active and experimental learning. In this way the consequences of decisions are made visible and participants can try out all options, gaining experience from trial and error. It is particularly important to spread knowledge amongst tech savvy young people via new media and to make use of the less formal pedagogical methods offered by technology. The target audience is mainly schoolchildren, but the tool has also been used for employees and could therefore have a wide-ranging impact.