

16th ANNUAL MEETING OF THE STRASBOURG CLUB, EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY NETWORK *16-21 November 2018*

Manifesto of the European youth and representatives of the cities of the Strasbourg Club on the future of Europe

Issue 1 : Defending and promoting the European values: European solidarity, from theory to practice

1. Democratic processes and elections

In today's societies, low participation in elections leads to a democratic deficit on local, national and international levels.

In response to this problem we are proposing to improve the voting system to make it more accessible, transparent, safer and cheaper.

For example, the broad adoption of electronic voting could be a solution to increase participation, make results more legitimate and decrease negative impacts caused by the democratic deficit. This system could also help to reduce the global cost of elections.

2. The challenge of reception and integration of newcomers

This major challenge can only be solved by an international initiative. However, local authorities and civil society play an essential role in integrating migrants. This can be done by promoting the citizen participation of migrants on a local level.

Our recommendations are:

- *Implementing temporary volunteering programs with local residents, for better integration of migrants into the labor market.*
- *Allowing migrants to vote in local elections and to set up special integration committees in local institutions (e.g. equal opportunity committee).*

- *Creating more “cultural centers” in every city in order to share experiences through events, language courses, and after school programs.*
- *Promoting migrants’ participation in existing organizations and encouraging them to set up new ones.*
- *Encouraging the creation of a “host family” system, reducing taxes for the families who choose to participate.*

3. European values

In today’s Europe, many citizens perceive European values as a distant and vague concept, and do not have the information and educational means to fully comprehend them. This lack of knowledge undermines the trust of citizens in the European idea.

In this context, it’s fundamental for European citizens to undergo a reconciliation with the founding principles of the Union.

For instance, we recommend increased campaigns to inform the general public of the founding principles of the European Union, as well as educational measures to reach younger generations at the earliest ages.

4. Social inclusion

Even if so much progress has been made towards gender equality, there remain enormous divides between the lives of men and women that need to be understood.

We recommend that greater efforts should be made in favor of:

- *Better integration of gender issues and sex education in primary, secondary and higher education*
- *Social media campaigns with influencers such as celebrities and local representatives, and successful stories of powerful men and women.*
- *A strong involvement of men throughout the process is essential, since equal opportunities are not only a women's matter.*

5. Role of civil society

An active civil society enhances transparency, good governance and accountability, and can help guarantee participatory involvement on a bigger scale. The lack of youth involvement in civil society, as well as insufficient cooperation between local authorities and youth, leads to low participation in elections and skepticism towards local, national and European establishments.

Active youth involvement in civil society could be reached by creating autonomous youth councils in every city that would work in cooperation with municipalities and local authorities. To strengthen the voice and active involvement of youth, an advisory seat in the municipal council could be set up. In this way, it can be guaranteed that young people are a welcome part of the process, able to voice their opinions and recommendations on local issues.

This involvement could lead to informing young people on how municipalities work on a local level and stimulate public discussions, sit downs and debates on various local matters. Local residents would also be included.

Issue 2: Europe face to face with environmental challenges

1. Green cities

The increase of private vehicle transportation globally has led higher levels of pollution, which consequently contributed to climate change.

In this matter, local authorities should be considered as key stakeholders.

We propose that cities take the lead against climate change by strengthening and expanding public transportation networks. This could be established by investing in green infrastructure, increasing efficiency and accessibility of cities. This will contribute to social inclusion for residents of rural areas, reducing the gap between urban and rural residents. Special attention should also be paid to the price of the service, to make it as affordable as possible. It is also very important to include the promotion of cycling in the planning of city infrastructure.

2. Agriculture and water resources

Intensive farming has negative impacts on the quantity and quality of our water resources.

In order to limit the impact on our resources, smart policy choices are essential.

Policies should implement more funds to the development of smart technologies and to encourage good practices in agriculture, such as pesticide-free farming and low water use. Water management should also be improved at the river basin level, as well as on the local level.

To achieve these recommendations, training courses for farmers on affordable smart technologies could be implemented. Farmers' knowledge on good practices could be shared during local events promoted by local authorities. The authorities could also encourage the transition from intensive to organic agriculture by promoting, encouraging and funding environmentally friendly farmers. Finally, meetings between farmers, water organizations and local authorities could be proposed to discuss appropriate infrastructures and good water management.

3. Ecological behavior

Global population growth and the effects of climate change require people to reevaluate their practices. Thus, governmental bodies should continue to encourage environmentally sustainable consumer behaviors.

Until now, it has been common to punish behavior and actions that contribute to pollution of the planet. We are suggesting to look at the problem in a different way, by focusing on rewards and inducements rather than punishment.

We propose a point system that would be based on the ecological practices of both individuals and businesses. Good practices would be rewarded with "points" that could be transformed into "bonuses" for individuals and for companies.