

RAISE YOUTH VOICE - THE WEPION'S TALKS

If you believe the international indicators, Old Europe is at the end of the race. In search of a second economic breath, in loss of diplomatic influence, curled up on its complex of cultural superiority, experts from leading institutions only don't bet anymore on it. Elsewhere, new voices emerge. Africa opens up to the world, Asia is getting more democratic, in the heart of South America, this exuberant political laboratory, Brazil is Metis and go richer, already the fifth largest economy. Here at home, Europe is mired in racism and get poorer, should one see it as a sign? Maybe, except that Europe is not that old, despite the stereotypes they are trying to stick on it. Everywhere revolt rumbles, young people are there waiting their turn. They are fed up that the generation of technocratic official speaks and thinks for them. They do not want to shut up and obey...

In 2001, two years after the massacre at Columbine, United States, Marilyn Manson, then accused of being one of the factors responsible for the massacre, responded to an interview with Mikael Moore. He asked him what he would say to the kids of Columbine, and Manson answered he wouldn't say a word, but listen to what youngsters have to say, that no one had done¹. This awareness, which seems to be an evidence, still is rarely found even here in Europe, even in 2014. That is why, on the beginning of March, 400 youngsters from 12 countries of the EU gathered here in Wepion. The event is called Raise Youth Voice and the title summarizes the main objective of this meeting: be the voices of young people heard.

So I set to work: A notebook, a pen, and a short interview format. In seven questions, I collected the opinions of 47 participants, not far from 12% of the group. Now, like a best of, an anthology of these exchanges.

In a few words, who are you?

- I am a high school student, a member of the Youth Council (aka YC) of my city, Carcassonne;
 - I am a Turkish schoolgirl from Bursa;
 - I am a student in an engineering school;
 - I'm here as a young homosexual from Rotterdam;
 - I'm supposed to study social sciences in Erasmus but mostly I learn foreign languages and the Spanish art of Fiesta!
 - I am a student in art school;
 - I'm young, gay and European;
 - I volunteer in various youth projects for popular education and international exchanges;
 - Arts and political sciences student, I am also very interested in the cultural and international exchange programs;
 - I am a student and member of the YC in my town;
 - I am energetic, positive, determined... learning how to work with kids and schoolgirl
 - I am a Berberian European, in professional training, I came with the Youth Center of my city;
 - I am a high school student interested in foreign languages, sports, travelling, and I write a blog;
 - Student in economics, I am also a young entrepreneur;
 - I am a student in Romania, I study languages and I love to read;
 - In civic service, I take care while waiting to know what to do with my life;
 - I am a juggler, future kid leader, almost student and especially from Brittany!
 - I am a student in social science in Germany, sports, and film passionate;
 - I'll soon be graduated in physics, but I'm also a young Spanish especially curious about the world;
 - High school student, dancer, party girl and single, I am a typical young Westerner;
- I am a life enjoyer, a party animal who loves to meet people and share my two passions: the role playing games and welding...

¹ Cf Video from « Bowling for Columbine », <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1NOFSOeOBsk>

Tell me about how and with which organisation you are arrived on this project ?

- I am a member of the Youth and Culture House, where I do country dancing while also being a volunteer. I came to enjoy the journey. I jumped on the opportunity to visit the European Parliament. I discovered RYV project during the journey. I think it is a good idea because it will allow us to express our problems at the Parliament...
- I came with the Association Lack of Practice, from the Necatibey vocational school, working on the theme of education, including its practices. We seek to reform the education system by combining reflection and practice. But I'm also here to improve my English, travel, discover Brussels, and also because the subject of this meeting interest me...
- Our organisation to get inspired from other cultures so to import new ideas and renew practices. Our leader was already in the network Contact 2103² and thinking that this meeting correspond to my expectations, he invited me to RYV...
 - I came to improve my social behaving. I am also here to get inspired from other cultures...
- Our organisation is called Rainbow City Rotterdam, and we are members of the LGBT Network LCUC. It's a non-profit organisation funded by the Dutch Government and some private sponsors. We give information to young gay, organize meetings, doing education, prevention, etc. I came here to compare our practices with those of other European countries, how it works for LGBTs around us, and also to do a photo report on this meeting...
 - Invited by the foundation where I am in internship, I came because I am interested in the sociology of media as well as philosophy, but what particularly attracted me was the international opportunity...
 - I was asked if I would come and I couldn't say no !
- I'm not really part of the organisation that brought me here, since I do study about this group, but I feel very close to its ideas. I came without knowing what it was, but now that I've been told, I understand better what I'm doing there and find the RYV Project very interesting...
- Our organization is called Bloom Associacio Sociocultural, we are from Lousã, Portugal, and are members of Contact 2103. I'm in RYV since the beginning, this is a great and really meaningful project...
- I came with the Youth and Culture House where I volunteer, invited by the coordinator of the youth sector that motivated us and made us work on the project from the beginning. I want to express my political beliefs and be an actress of the change...
 - I came to talk with other young Europeans, interested in intercultural exchange...
 - This is my second exchange with the Youth and Culture House of Mauguio. I entered it by participating in the production of a video clip against discrimination...
- Street educators in my neighborhood are in connection with the Youth House, they told me about the project, and I came because it was the opportunity to visit Brussels !
- We came with the Redividus Hair Association, from Buzau, Romania. Invited by our leader, we were informed about RYV and were immediately highly motivated to participate. Especially since this is not our first exchange...
- I came to tell MEPs that we, the youth, have to be heard, but also to meet other youngsters. I am part of the Youth House of St Georges-sur-Meuse, where I am a volunteer moderator, board member of the association and of the Youth Council...

We are now living the Meeting, how are you involved ?

- I am in the Entertainment Group, we prepare the evenings, we welcome the arriving delegations... With my delegation, we went to visit the Parliament, but I felt it was not suitable for a group of teenagers. It was poorly organized, not very clear, and frankly boring.
 - I am in the Theatre Group, we prepare a forum for the Parliament Session.
 - I am in the Media Group because I want to write an article about this meeting.

² European network of youth associations existing since 1998. They share the same desire to pursue a common policy and youth coordinated at European level. See www.contact-2103.org

- I'm in the Media Group for the opportunity to improve my video skills.
- I am in the Youth Pride and in the Festival Groups during the day, then in the Swimming Pool Group at the end of the workshops, and at night I am fully in the Zouk Love Group !
- We were among the first delegations to get in, we are very involved. I participate in the small newspaper called Raise Youth Pen, in conjunction with the Media Group.
- I'm organising the Youth Pride demonstration in the streets of Brussels , including the preparation of banners against discrimination.
 - I'm in the Festival Group, we prepare the pits of each delegation.
 - I am in the Theatre Group and I visit other groups to offer my services as a makeup artist.
- I'm involved in the Youth Pride Group, I did some of the choreography of the blue route, the one with the zombies !
 - We are in the Media Group especially doing video edition.
- I am in the group that prepares the meeting with Martin Schulz (Pdt of the European Parliament).
- I am in the entertainment group and also preparing the parliamentary session on Friday morning. I just learned that I'll be co-chair of the session !
- I am mainly concerned with the reception of newcomers, just now I'm expecting the Andalusian delegation, do you know how to say " Welcome in Belgium " in Spanish ? (Author's note: Yes, I know!)

This is a European gathering. Europe, what does it make you think about ?

Erasmus, other languages, full of neighboring countries to visit --- Love it, it's a very good thing. We need more solidarity, more tolerance --- I think about Middle East, because finally we are not so different --- Nothing, not much, I 'm not sure what to think --- Countries are not really connected, there's a lack of unity, there are many differences and a long way to do... Especially in the rights of minorities like LGBTs, foreigners, etc --- a wonderful place to travel, the rest I don't care --- I see Europe as a second home, wider, larger, to explore --- I have no definite opinion about the European Union, it is difficult to explain --- A strong potential, I also fight for the abolition of borders within the Union --- something that affects us directly but which is quite inaccessible. Young people are not heard --- different countries, different cultures, and finally a large family with many problems to solve --- This is the Old Continent, without us, no America ! --- Europe for me, is alive through this kind of project, which allows us to build strong and long-term relationships...

There is much about politic in the talks, do you feel touched ?

- Politic is about reorganising the society. Today we often fight to retrieve the things we've lost. For example, in my town recently, we reopen the swimming pool...
 - I see no difference between human beings, I do not understand these left and right stories, everyone is equal, isn't it ?
 - Politic depresses me !
 - I'm not too interested in politics, even if I know it's important, but it is not my passion...
 - Regarding politics, I 'm interested, especially what happens at the global level , but not those damned parties...
- I'm not old enough to vote, so it doesn't interest me so much, and I 'm not very aware of what's happening...
 - I 'm not too invested in politics...
 - I know it is important, but it all seems so far away...
- I am very interested in politics, especially what's about the control society and feminist struggles...
 - I am involved in politics, as a member of the Young Socialists in Portugal...
- Politics is a closed group, especially for young people who are not really allowed in. I'm a social libertarian, I think it's up to us to decide and do things...

- The idea is to take important decisions in our every day's life, but the politicians are not listening...
- Getting involved in politics, that is to do his duty as a citizen, one should be more concerned...
 - Politics? Not too much, we're too young to vote, but we are interested...
- Wait, who do you work for ? No, I have nothing to say, I'm not into politics, moreover, it is not me, I was not there that day... I want a lawyer...
 - Let's move all these old farts and rejuvenate the system !

Well, it's over, unless you want to add a comment ?

I'm not going to write down here the long list of "great, so cool, it's a hit !" etc. Not to mention those who simply had nothing more to say at this point. I'll just keep three points that stood out, and it will be the last word :

- I would love to stay here, Belgium is my deal, good vibes and low prices !
 - Something to add ? Yes, long live Anarchy !!
- Congratulations to all the federations for the huge organization, it is quite a week, count on me for the next , don't release the fight !

Thank's to you who have agreed to play to the game, I do not quote you all but I know you'll recognise yourselves. When we see you on weeks like this, we can say that Europe has a great future... Belgian brewers too ! This is only the beginning , a first step we ascended together, but there's still a lot to climb, so keep the rythm, we'll meet on next time...