

EP Elections and Beyond: Active Participation of EU citizens at All Levels

Second Transnational Reflection Group Meeting

12-13 September 2019, Bratislava, Slovakia

'Diversity', 'unity', 'freedom and privilege', 'opportunity', and 'huge experiment' - this is what the EU means to participants of the Second Transnational Reflection Group Meeting that took place in Bratislava on the 12-13 September 2019. Four months after the European Parliament elections 23 young leaders from 9 European countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Montenegro, Poland and Slovakia) gathered in Bratislava for discussions on EU citizens' engagement. Together with 3 partners' representatives, 4 distinguished speakers and 6 GLOBSEC Policy Institute research fellows, they spent two days identifying concerns and formulating recommendations for EU policymakers on how to close the gap between the EU and her citizens, using .slido to ask and answer questions throughout the event.

After a short presentation on the aims and activities of the project, the event was kicked off on Thursday by a roundtable discussion on what kind of Europe do we want with MEP elect Miriam Lexmann and Livia Vašáková, the Economic Team Leader at the Representation of the European Commission in Slovakia. Before opening remarks from the speakers, each participant had the opportunity to say what the EU means to them. All considered it a worthwhile project (though its potential is unfulfilled and its future uncertain); it's a place they call home that allows them to work, study, travel, learn and open their minds to new possibilities. Miriam Lexmann picked up on the EU being primarily based on a set of values that must continue to unite us, but she also argued that we must avoid oversimplifying the EU. Cultural, social and legal issues remain important, but as Livia Vašáková emphasized, the EU must also take a lead on the global political and economic stage, and in areas of climate change and digitalisation.

The last session of the day was dedicated to the working groups, whereby our participants sought to identify strengths and weaknesses across the EU and its member states in five areas: 1. Education and opportunities for the youth, 2. Migration, internal and external security, 3. Environment and sustainability, 4. Employment, social affairs and inclusion and 5. EU as a global actor.

The main concerns from each group were presented on Friday morning to start the most important task – coming up with concrete solutions in each area. The issues identified partly overlapped with and partly surpassed the expectations identified by the first transnational reflection group last November. This underlined the continuing deficiencies across the Union, whilst also demonstrating a shift in priorities of the EU citizens, especially young people. The participants emphasized the need for the EU to come up with more intersectoral approaches; to redefine the debate on issues including the environment, social affairs and EU's global role; and to involve all those concerned in the discussions on these very issues.

That last point especially became pivotal in the second roundtable discussion with State Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of Slovakia František Ružička, and Thibault Muzergues, Europe Program Director at the International Republican Institute in Bratislava. This session focused on how to get the EU that her citizens want. In a lively and challenging debate on issues ranging from climate change through economy to Western Balkans, one single recommendation for young people stood out – get involved in politics and convert the many great ideas that you have into concrete policies.

The EUact event closed with a second round of working groups, focused on figuring out what can be done specifically to address the issues singled out the day before, including the insufficient integration of sustainability goals, the inequality of education and work opportunities, and lack of a unified vision on EU's desired global role. Their points and proposals will form a Policy Brief to be shared through the networks of our project partners and the young leaders; they will also form the last piece for EUact project final report to be presented to key EU experts and representatives this November.