

SYMPOSIUM: Supporting inclusive governance for sustainable democracy to celebrate 10 Years of the European Day of Solidarity between Generations

24 April 2018, Kartuizer Centre, Brussels

FULL REPORT

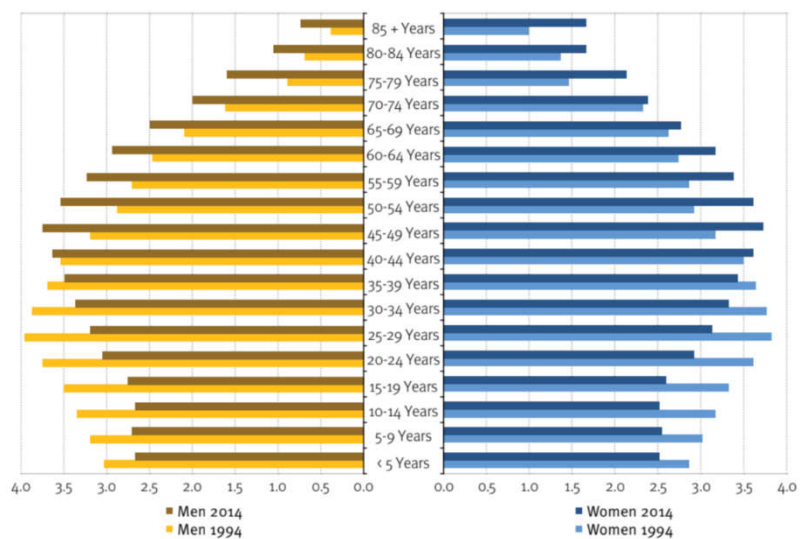


Photo credit: Marilyn Neven, International IDEA

No model of democratic governance can be inclusive and sustainable without ensuring dialogue and solidarity between generations. To mark the 10th anniversary of the *European Day of Solidarity between Generations*, and highlight their respective commitments to promoting solidarity between generations, the European Seniors’ Union and the Office of International IDEA to the EU organized a Symposium on, “Supporting inclusive governance for sustainable democracy, to celebrate ten years of the European Day of Solidarity between Generations”, in Brussels on 24 April 2018. Bringing generations back to political processes, exchanging visions of how solidarity among generations can be promoted, sharing of innovative mechanisms and good examples from practice, and the importance of setting political priorities for the 2019 European elections, were among the main matters discussed during the event.

Andrew Bradley, Director and Head of the Office of International IDEA to the European Union, opened the Symposium by welcoming the participants and providing views on the wider scope of intergenerational solidarity, and calling on European political parties to incorporate this value in party election manifestos for 2019. **An Hermans**, President of the European Seniors’ Union, highlighted the need for improved dialogue and solidarity, based on the increasing number of seniors in Europe, and related impact

Figure 1. Population structure by five-year age groups and sex, EU-28, 1994 and 2014 (% of total population)



(*) Data refer to 1 January of each reference years. 1994: EU-27;2014: provisional data given the non-availability of detailed data for Greece. Source: Eurostat (online data code: demo_pjangroup)



on economy and social systems. She also alluded to raising intergenerational awareness in Europe, and made reference the Brexit referendum, through which the potential impact of intergenerational gaps on society became more apparent. As experiences from daily life and ESU involvement have led to more awareness of intergenerational challenges, An Herman proposed a new vision on ageing, and adjustments to policies that would value qualities inherent to older generations for the benefit of all citizens.

A Keynote Address was delivered by **Marianne Thyssen**, European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, who set the stage for the ensuing panel discussion by providing an overview of demographic and economic challenges, urging for action to make European societies more sustainable. The EU has economic, social and political reasons to do so: besides general needs of sustainable growth, the safeguarding and promotion of values come into play, providing welfare for next generations to ensure that no one is left behind, and the fact that unemployment could lead to insecurity and political instability. The European Commission therefore developed the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#), comprising a framework of 20 rights and social values, including inclusive access to social protection, fair working conditions for all, and equal opportunities. Only by promoting digital literacy to older generations, the potential and opportunities provided by digitalization can be fully embraced. The European Pillar of Social Rights presents a major step towards social protection for everyone in society, independently of working modalities. To promote active participation of all in society, the Commissioner recently proposed the [European Accessibility Act](#), aiming at improved user-friendliness of everyday products and services. To implement the social right to education, training and life-long learning, the European Commission launched the [New Skills Agenda for Europe](#). And a Directive on Work Life Balance was introduced to enable people to take up caring responsibilities, and to promote gender equality at work. The Commissioner concluded by mentioning that the EU should cooperate with social partners and civil society to ensure inclusive governance and social security based on the principle of equal opportunity. The challenge is to reshape Europe, and prepare it for future generations: this objective must be shaped by solidarity. [The full text of the Keynote Address can be consulted here.](#)

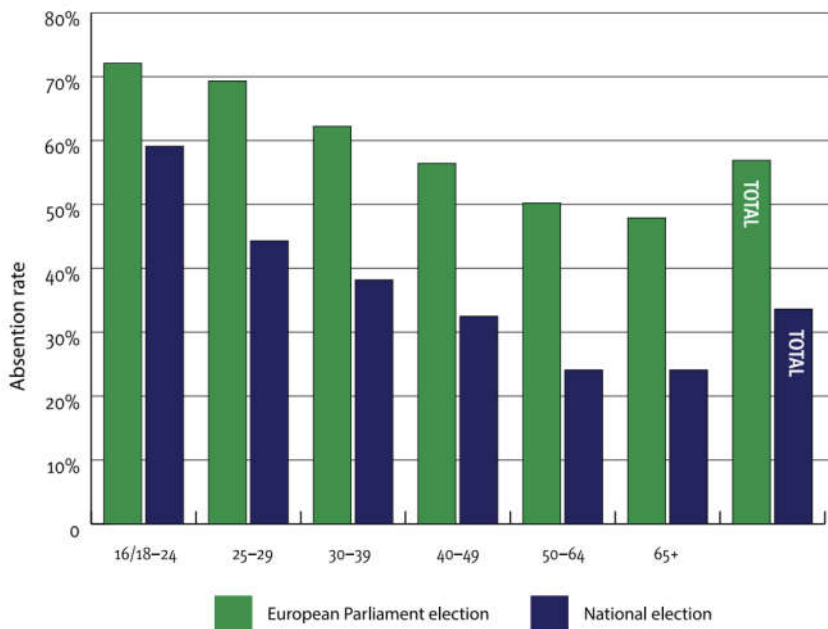
Andrianos Giannou, President of the Youth of the European People's Party (EPP), provided some political perspectives on the 2019 European Elections and EPP strategies to attract younger audiences. According to him, moving forward 'to leave no one behind', implies the formulation of practical solutions to ensure inclusive growth, innovation, and a new European social model. **Didrik de Schaetzen**, Head of Communications of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) Party, commented that instead of using quotas to promote the political representation of underrepresented generations, other methods can be more efficient. He referred to innovative ways of input in programmatic work of political parties, and political decision-making. The experience of the ALDE Party to allow for individual membership is positive, and helpful in the endeavour to include all generations in political decision-making.

After the political statements, the programme continued with a panel discussion on "Involving generations in dialogue for democracy and European intergenerational solidarity", with **Tom Vandenkendelaere**, Member of the European Parliament, **Julia Krebs**, Member of the European Student's Forum (AEGEE Europe) and Election Mission Adviser at AEGEE Election Observation, **Mathilde Poncelet**, Head of Public Relations and Communications of JA Europe, **Alec de Laminne de Bex**, Mentor at DUO for a Job, and **Julie Bodson**, Advocacy Coordinator at DUO for a Job. **Andrew Bradley** acted as moderator, and invited panellists to reflect on a new intergenerational vision of

Europe, based on the maximization of participation of young people, tapping of the experience of elder people, and the organization of intergenerational dialogue.

Tom Vandenkendelaere invited all participants to start with reflecting on how to put intergenerational solidarity into practice in their daily life, as it is not only about pensions and the future of healthcare, but also about changing mind-sets and practicing solidarity on a daily basis. One generation should not accept to be a “burden on society”. A focus on demographic changes and digitalization processes can help to develop new avenues for intergenerational solidarity, as combining resources and skills will maximize value to the society. Digital literacy should be achieved for all: young and old, male or female, poor or rich, and employed or unemployed. A genuine debate on how to do this should take place between generations. Political participation is of essence, and growing political weight of voters should be followed by more inclusion in democratic cycles.

Figure 2. Voter absenteeism in elections to the EP and national parliaments in the EU-28 region



Source: Schmitt et al. (2015)

Note: Respondents answered 'Did not vote' to the following questions: 'Did you yourself vote in the recent European Parliament elections?' or 'Did you yourself vote in the [national elections]?'

more intergenerational solidarity. The [European Citizens Initiative](#) and the [Lifelong Learning Platform](#) are used as vehicles to express concerns of young people and students throughout Europe. A number of initiatives already incorporate forms of intergenerational dialogue, and especially when combined with senior business experts: [Leaders for a Day](#) is an initiative implemented by JA Europe, and [DUO for a Job](#) brings together talented young people and senior professionals for intergenerational and intercultural coaching. The focus should be on sharing experience rather than on teaching values. For optimal inclusion in society, throughout their career, people should evolve in their conceptions and adapt to new circumstances in a proactive way. Creating and maintaining networks seems to be essential for participation and inclusion at all levels for all ages.

Ms Anne-Sophie Parent, Secretary-General of AGE Platform Europe, closed the Symposium by commemorating the inclusive pioneering talks that led, ten years ago, to the declaration of the

European Day for Solidarity between Generations by the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. She pointed at the barriers that still hamper the promotion of intergenerational solidarity, such as policies based on age limits, gender-related obstacles and youth unemployment. The role of older people in society should be recognized, and more needs to be done to prevent poverty and social exclusion of the elderly, and tackle the gender pension gap. At the same time, political will is needed to update social protection systems that donot penalize young people. To strike this balance, the creation of structures and facilities where generations can talk, and exchange views to understand each other’s challenges with a view to find solutions fair to all, are needed. The concept of intergenerational fairness needs to be understood at the EU institutional level, to promote intergenerational awareness in law-making. It is time to think about a society in which age difference does not matter anymore.

In line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the global objective of leaving “no one behind”, the EU Institutions and other stakeholders need to find ways to combine the resources and skills of all generations to create better opportunities. More solidarity can be achieved by encouraging the transfer of skills among generations, and promoting dialogue to break down existing barriers. Active participation of the young and older generations is essential to ensure sustainable development.

In the framework of its programme on, “Inter-generational Dialogue for Democracy”, the Office of International IDEA to the EU has implemented initiatives to provide practical advice for policy formulations that could help establish a new solidarity between generations. On various occasions, the Office could count on the collaboration of the European Senior’s Union and other partners to build on the programme, and to raise the importance of the topic in the EU policy agenda.



Photo: European Seniors’ Union

Welcoming remarks by Andrew Bradley, Director and Head of the Office of International IDEA to the European Union (left); Keynote address by Marianne Thyssen, European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility (right)



Photo: Gosia Calabro / Marilyn Neven – International IDEA

Panelists from left to right: Ms. Julie Bodson, Mr. Alec de Laminne de Bex, Ms. Mathilde Poncet, Ms. Julia Krebs, Mr. Tom Vandenkendelaere and Mr. Andrew Bradley (left picture); Tom Vandenkendelaere, Member of the European Parliament (right picture).



Photo: European Seniors' Union

An Hermans, President of the European Seniors' Union (left); Julia Krebs, Member of the European Student's Forum (AEGEE Europe) (right)



Photo: Marilyn Neven /European Seniors' Union

Ms. Anne-Sophie Parent, Secretary-General of AGE Platform Europe (left)