ADDRESSING YOUTH ABSENTEEISM IN EUROPEAN ELECTIONS

LEAGUE OF YOUNG VOTERS
EUROPE

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ALDE
Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

EPP
European People's Party

EU
European Union

LYMEC
European Liberal Youth

MEP
Member of European Parliament

PES
Party of European Socialists

PIREDEU
Providing an Infrastructure for Research
on Electoral Democracy in the European Union

YEPP
Youth of the European People's Party

YES
Young European Socialists

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study takes a comprehensive approach to understanding the reasons why young people abstain from voting in large numbers in elections to the European Parliament; it considers both the sociological profile of young abstainers and the offers that political parties make.

The study contains three main findings: first, absenteeism by young people is related to socio-economic factors; second, there is mutual distrust between political parties and young people; third, political parties have yet to take into account changes in young people's forms of political activism and means of communication.

The European Union has addressed criticism of its democratic deficit by increasingly empowering the European Parliament. Yet, since 1979, voter turnout has declined in every election. The 2009 European Parliamentary election was marked by youth absenteeism of almost 65%.

'Eurobarometer' data from 2009 show that all the main socio-demographic factors affect the likelihood of voting. The typical young abstainer is: a woman under the age of 25; who sees herself as belonging to the lower tiers of society; has only

a secondary education; and is either not working or is in manual employment.

The data also show that because a majority of young voters abstain, political parties – quite rationally – do not target young people in their campaigns. In a sample of party manifestos in five countries for the 2009 European Parliamentary election campaigns, half the parties failed to mention young people and, among those that did, most failed to offer specific policies when referring to youth issues.

The study considers four possible reasons as to why young people do not vote in European Parliamentary elections. Rational choice theorists argue that when individual votes are not seen to make a difference, citizens prefer to devote their time to other pursuits than to politics. However, data demonstrate that this does not hold for young voters in European elections, as young people rarely cite a preference for private affairs as a reason for absenteeism.

A second explanation is that absenteeism is a form of protest against the EU. However, data does not support this theory, as young people are the least likely to abstain through

dissatisfaction with the EU. An alternative explanation suggests that elections for the European Parliament are seen as second-order elections. However, the data show a strong correlation between voting in national and European Parliamentary elections. Voters who abstain in national elections almost certainly abstain in European Parliamentary elections, too.

A third theory simply states that young people feel excluded from politics and that the issues they care about are not considered. This is consistent with the lack of attention to youth issues in parties' manifestos and the existence of few young candidates for office. When young people perceive this, apathy towards politics can develop. In addition, political institutions are failing to make the most of new media to engage young voters in the ways they prefer.

The fourth theory suggests that young people are not disengaged from politics, but rather their preferred forms of activism have not been recognised by parties and governments. Research shows that younger people's political engagement has shifted away from electoral politics towards cause-orientated political action and networking. Parties need to engage better with these forms of political involvement as a way of channelling them into electoral turnout.

Precisely because young people are not disengaged from political issues, they can be brought back to the ballot box. This study makes recommendations on changes that can be made which will assist the process of encouraging young people to become more involved in the political institutions and processes that exist today at both national and European levels.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Member states should establish a quota on party MEP candidates: 25% should be aged under 35;

- Replace the existing methods of selecting candidates for election with open primaries;

- Include youth issues clearly in party manifestos without 'ghettoising';

- Target key groups of young people: students, the socially excluded and first time voters;

- Broadcast a high profile youth-focused debate among top candidates of the European elections, such as between the European political parties' candidates for the position of President of the European Commission;

- Use social media to engage and network with the audience;

- Integrate the history and role of the EU into national educational systems;

- Simplify the process of voting;

- Lower the voting age for European elections.

INTRODUCTION

European elections are one of the paradoxes of European Union (EU) integration. The EU has responded to criticisms of its democratic deficit by increasingly empowering the European Parliament the institution that directly represents citizens at EU level. From its origins as an unelected, broadly powerless assembly in the 1950s, the Parliament has become a directly elected co-legislator. Throughout the history of EU integration, competencies and political responsibilities have fluctuated between EU institutions and the EU member states. The Parliament, however, is the one institution that has seen its authority increase with every reform of the Treaties of the EU since 1986. Yet, since 1979, voter turnout has declined in every single election. The 2009 European election was marked by a rate of youth absenteeism of almost 65%, a level rarely found in democratic politics. Figure 1, below, shows that the electoral participation of younger voters is almost 30% below that of older voters. This figure suggests that when young people grow older, they are more likely to vote.

Figure 1 Turnout per age group
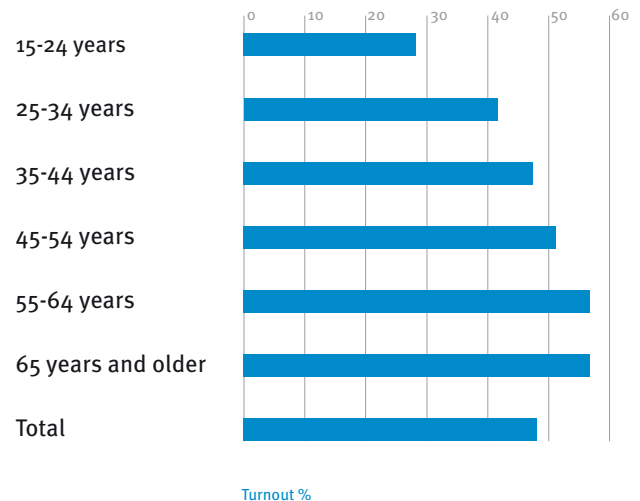
Turnout %

Youth absenteeism in European elections needs to be put into a comparative context (Figure 2, below). Falling voter turnout is a common trend and young voters abstain more than the general population in all European democracies (Norris 2003). Total electoral turnout has declined in all national elections in EU member states, from an average of 83% in the 1980s to 65% in the last elections recorded (figure 2 next page). This phenomenon is related inter alia to youth absenteeism, in that decreasing turnout among young people translates into absenteeism later in life.

Figure 2 1980-2013: Decreasing turnout in national elections in the EU since 1980 [1]

Youth absenteeism in European elections is related to two significant political changes over the last two decades. The first is the controversy about the legitimacy of the process of European integration. The EU has acquired competences and influence more quickly than the pace at which the public has become involved in its decision-making. Absenteeism by members of the younger generations demonstrates that living in an increasingly integrated Europe is not a sufficient incentive to persuade them to vote. Second, declining voter turnout in general, and in particular among young people, is directly related to changes in the forms of political socialisation and activism. Political socialisation is still pursued by formal and informal national political institutions, which means that youth absenteeism in European Parliamentary elections is also rooted in national politics. These two changes are taken into account in the study's discussion of the issues; they suggest that EU institutions, national governments and all levels of political players need to be involved in the process of bringing young people back to the ballot box.

This study is structured in four sections, seeking answers to the following questions: why are young people voting in such low numbers? What can be done to reverse this situation? The problem is approached from two directions: examination of the demand side, with an analysis of the sociological profile of young abstainers; and a review of the offer side, in terms of what political parties offer young voters in the context of European Parliamentary elections.

Section 1 examines the character profile of young abstainers;

Section 2 looks at the different aspects of young people's political representation;

Section 3 examines the causes of youth absenteeism;

Section 4 summarises and proposes concrete recommendations.

I

THE SOCIAL PROFILE OF YOUNG ABSTAINERS

All the main socio-demographic factors (age, gender, social position and occupational situation) affect the likelihood of voting. The sociological profile of the typical abstainer is a woman under 25, who perceives herself as belonging to the lower social class, having achieved secondary education only, not in active employment and living in a medium-size town (Annex, Figures 3 to 6). The principal factors that affect the absenteeism rate are:

- **Age**: 64% of 15 to 34 year olds abstained, of which 71% of under 25 abstained, falling to 58% for those between 25 and 34;

- **Gender**: young women abstain from voting more than young men do. This bias is more acute in the younger sub-group than in the older one, where figures of absenteeism among men and women are broadly similar;

- **Social class**: absenteeism is more frequent among those members of the younger generation who perceive themselves as being on the bottom rungs of the social ladder. Rates

of absenteeism are significantly higher among students, the unemployed and manual workers, and lower among young professionals;

- **Size of community**: young voters absenteeism is higher in mid-size towns and lower in small towns, rural areas and larger urban areas.

The sociological profile of young abstainers in the European Parliamentary elections is thus characterised by forms of disadvantage reflecting the nature of social exclusion among young people. Emmenegger and Palier (2012: 44-45) show that in countries where the Southern European and Liberal social models are prevalent – characterised by a strong duality between older people better integrated into the labour market and protected by social security programmes, and younger people that tend to be excluded – there is a strong difference in voting turnout between 'insiders' and 'outsiders'.

This is reflected in the cross-country differences in rates of youth turnout in the last European elections, where there

are significant differences in absolute rates of absenteeism and in rates of absenteeism relative to age. The most extreme cases – excluding Belgium, Luxembourg, Cyprus and Greece, where voting is mandatory – are Sweden, where the absenteeism rate was 41% for under 35[5], and the United Kingdom, where the absenteeism rate was a staggering 82% for the same group. In general, youth turnout was higher in some northern member states (Sweden, Denmark) and exceptionally low in France, the United Kingdom, Spain and some new

member states such as Lithuania and Slovenia. There are also interesting differences in the distribution of absenteeism between the young and the general population. The largest difference is in the Netherlands, with 25% higher absenteeism among young voters, whereas the smallest is in Portugal, with only 2% of difference. These divisions are partly related to issues of political culture (for example, turnout in Italy is still influenced by memories of mandatory voting) and civic education.

Methodology

The 2009 Eurobarometer Survey is used as the main source of quantitative data, as it is the sole provider of detailed information about the reasons for absenteeism.

Two sources of qualitative information are used. First, ten interviews were carried out of staff of EU political parties, party youth branches and civil society activists in Brussels.

Second, party manifestos, from five new and old member states, were examined in detail to identify cross-national differences. The manifestos were selected for their significant differences in terms of youth absenteeism (the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Spain, Sweden and Slovakia).

II

YOUNG PEOPLE, POLITICAL REPRESENTATION AND PARTY ACTIVISM

2.1

BACKGROUND

Political parties have been the main means for political participation and representation in Europe for more than a century. However, there is a widening gap between political parties and young people as evidenced by the strong decline in party membership over the last two decades (Whiteley: 2011): in Europe, as few as 2% of young people are members of a political party (Annex, figure 19). Research points to the effect that the growing distrust towards parties has to do with their ability to articulate the political participation of young people. Party membership is now so rare that it can no longer be considered as an indicator of people's political commitment (Van Biezen, Mair, Poguntke: 2012). This is consistent with the cartel party thesis (Katz and Mair: 2009) that states

parties are becoming detached from their roots in society and are moving towards being part of the State apparatus, thanks to their control over key mechanisms of political competition. In this sense, they have abandoned several of the deliberative and participatory functions to emphasise the elite selection ones.

This has only a partial effect on political competition in the context of the EU due to the intrinsic weakness of European political parties. European-level political parties do not fulfil the same functions as their national counterparts: most of them are federations of parties reflecting a minimum common denominator among parties of a broadly similar family; and have no direct members (although this is starting to change). Even though European parties are increasingly cohesive in votes within the European Parliament (Hix, Noury and Roland: 2005), their main weakness is their inability to structure political competition at the level of the EU as the selection of candidates and strategies remain entirely in the hands of national parties. For instance, the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) sit as political and not national

2014: The first elections under the Lisbon Treaty: the effect of the new rules of the game.

The European Parliament has only recently acquired a say in the composition of the European Commission, as a result of incremental reforms to the Treaties. Parliament acquired the right to force the Commission's resignation in the Maastricht Treaty (1993). The Lisbon Treaty (2009) linked the designation of the President of the Commission to the results of the European elections.

The Lisbon Treaty also further expanded the legislative competences of the Parliament, making it the co-legislator – together with the Council – in all internal EU policy areas. However, the role of the European Parliament does not fit a traditional model of division of powers, as it lacks the competencies of other legislative bodies. The EU is still very far from being a traditional parliamentary democracy as the EU executive – to the extent to which its fragmentation between different institutions allows using such a notion (Chopin 2013) – does not have the right to recall the Parliament and call for new elections. Even though member state's leaders act as the political 'engine', they are accountable only to their national Parliaments. The European Parliament also lacks the ability to propose legislation — one of the most basic functions of a legislature. To sum up, while the Parliament's role is now stronger thanks to the Lisbon Treaty, it remains weaker than that of most of its national counterparts.

groups, but they have been elected not as candidates of a European but of a national party. The result is that key aspects of EU political life – government and opposition, or the course to take in policy-making – are not structured by traditional political competition, such as the left / right and centre / periphery divisions (Bartolini, Hix: 2006) but rather by negotiation among the member states. The European Commission is formally a politically non-aligned body, as only the appointment of its President is made dependent on the result of European elections and the nomination of Commissioners is made by member states.

This section looks at three data sets to understand how the behaviour and strategies of the parties affect youth absenteeism: the number of young candidates in the 2009 Parliamentary elections; the presence of youth issues in the manifestos of the parties in five selected countries; and interviews with Euro-parties' officials and civil society activists in Brussels.

2.2

Young candidates in 2009

Parties have different ways of addressing youth issues. One is to include young people in positions of responsibility in the organisation and, second, to nominate them as candidates to elected office.

The PIREDEU (Providing an Infrastructure for Research on Electoral Democracy in the European Union) project survey data provides data about the age of candidates and their party affiliations in the 2009 election (Braun, Mikhaylov and Schmitt 2010).[II] The data show a gap between the proportion of young candidates and the proportion of young people in absolute terms. According to Eurostat,[III] 26% of the EU population is aged between 16 and 35, but just 19% of candidates were in this age range.

The data also indicate that there are differences between the political families, in that liberal parties have a higher proportion of young candidates, very close to the proportion of young people in the population of the EU. Communists, ecologists and centre agrarians had a proportion of young candidates around 20%, whereas all other parties were below these levels. In addition, the PIREDEU database offers information about the extent to which candidates are representative of younger voters: not surprisingly, young candidates give much more importance to the interests of the younger generation than older ones.

There is thus a significant under-representation of young people in elections for the European Parliament. This gap is significant for the political representation of young people in terms of three of the main categories of representation put forward by Pitkin (1972). MEPs are authorised representatives in that citizens appoint them in an election, so youth absenteeism means that young people are less represented in the authorisation dimension. The data above show, however, that they also participate less in two of the other categories. First, young people are under-represented in that there are fewer representatives to cater for their interests. Although there is no requirement to be young to stand for the interests of young persons, the data demonstrate that younger candidates, more than older candidates, identify with and grant more importance to the interests of young people. The lack of interest of older candidates produces a bias against the representation of young people, which then contributes to disengagement or apathy, in so far as young people perceive their interests to be ignored. Second, young people are under-represented in the descriptive sense, as twice as many young people would need to be elected to achieve representation in proportion to their population.

2.3

How parties address the younger generation

Beyond these quantitative data, let us consider how political parties address youth issues by looking first at the party manifestos and, second, by considering interviews with party officials. First, most manifestos tend to pay only lip service to youth issues. In general, the shorter the manifestos, the less attention they devote to specific youth issues. Only slightly more than half of the manifestos (17 of 30) refer to young people in any form at all. Even this already weak coverage of youth issues has to be qualified: seven of these 17 manifestos do not refer to young people specifically but rather mention them in the context of broader policy discussions. Four manifestos address youth issues in a horizontal way, by calling for comprehensive policies specific to young people. This means that only around a third of the manifestos refer to young people directly while two-thirds of the manifestos refer to them as a social group whose interests have to be considered and balanced against those of other groups. In other words, only four of the 30 parties suggested a comprehensive youth policy at EU level.

The tendency of the manifestos is instead to address youth issues as a specific area of political competition. Of the manifestos discussing issues related to young people, around 70% refer to the need to improve education, which at the EU level very often comes together with the notion of student mobility and the improvement of language skills.

There are a further three youth issues in the manifestos that receive very similar coverage. The first is participation and emancipation. This includes debates on the need to facilitate young people's participation in politics and in social life in the broadest sense. Some examples of forms of participation that are associated with youth participation policies are the European Citizens' Initiative (e.g. Groen Links)

transnational party lists (European Greens) or the strengthening of youth involvement in associations and EU level organisations, including the European Young Forum (e.g. Convergencia i Unió). What these approaches have in common is that they treat young people as active members of society and seek to empower them. This is in contrast to the second of the youth issues, where parties approach them from a more passive perspective, which seek to protect young people from dangers in society, such as crime, violence or abuse on the internet. A specific dimension of this way of framing the problems of young people is a public health approach, where parties seek to protect young people from the effects of drugs and alcohol. The third youth issue is youth unemployment. Unsurprisingly, half of the references come from Spain, where youth unemployment was already soaring in 2009, and it has continued to increase steadily since. That said, Spanish parties did not propose European-level policies, but proposed issues regulated at the national level. In contrast, the Dutch D66, Slovakian SDKU and Swedish Social Democrats referred to EU-specific interventions in this area.

This way of looking at youth politics has the advantage of making visible what parties have to offer to young voters. It is thus probable that parties will treat them in a similar way in the 2014 campaign. For instance, an interviewee from YEPP, the European People's Party (EPP) youth organisation, said that the EPP would have a separate 10 point youth manifesto in addition to its the main manifesto. Interviewees were almost unanimous in saying that of all the issues affecting young people, youth unemployment would receive the most attention in their manifestos. It is not clear however, whether parties will somehow modify their positions in relation to previous decisions on issues such as austerity, job market flexibility and training. For instance, an interviewee from the EPP was not certain that the party would campaign on the merits of austerity for the recovery of the EU's economy.

However not all interviewees agreed that addressing youth matters as a separate issue is the most appropriate strategy:

'We want to keep the manifesto for 2014 as short as possible, because in the past the party adopted 30 or 40 page long manifestos, which are useless because voters don't read them and parties don't use them in their programmes. So it will not necessarily address youth issues in a specific way, but rather highlight liberal demands in three or four core areas. This will allow national members to complement it with their own contents. The economic crisis and unemployment will be one of these areas and youth unemployment may obtain a particular focus. We are currently running a small campaign, Jobs for Youth, under LYMEC's (European Liberal Youth) website.' (Interview with an official of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE).)

However, some interviewees suggested that this approach runs the risk of over-specialising and 'ghettoising' youth politics, in that providing lip service to youth matters is easily turned into a box-ticking exercise. This risk was uttered in an interview with a member of the Young European Socialists (YES), the youth branch of the Party of European Socialists (PES), who suggests that this way of addressing youth issues risks turning them into a specific minority question:

'I am not sure that promoting more young people is a way to reconnect with young people. It can be problematic if 'youth issues' are systematically entrusted to young people in the party, as it can be a way of disenfranchisement or de-responsibilisation by the rest of the organisation, where youth issues are entrusted to a small and relatively weak sector.' (Interview with a member of YES.)

The issue was discussed at a roundtable[IV] with representatives of European political parties and their youth branches; the general opinion was that parties had to avoid 'ghettoisation'. Instead, it was suggested that youth issues should be made relevant to the whole of society and that young candidates need to stand for not only young people but also for all other age categories.

2.4

POLITICAL PARTIES AND YOUTH ABSENTEEISM

2.4.1 Background

Interviews were conducted with officials from European political parties in order to understand their perspectives on youth absenteeism, and the ways in which the parties viewed young voters. These interviews show that all parties are aware of the challenge of youth absenteeism for the future of democratic decision-making in the EU, but also that there is a strong possibility that the issue will not be seriously addressed. First, no party felt particularly concerned by the problem, so the commitment to specific action was not strong. Second, and related to the weaknesses of European level parties, most of the solutions that European parties had considered needed to be endorsed by national parties, who clearly have more interest in national, rather than European, campaigns.

All interviewees expressed concern about youth absenteeism as an issue that needs to be tackled in order to bolster the legitimacy of the EU. None of the parties, however, considered itself to be particularly affected by absenteeism, and all of them tended to see it as a structural problem unrelated to political competition. Hence, not one party saw the reduction of youth absenteeism as a matter of self-interest, which means that none of the parties has an incentive to act upon absenteeism on its own:

Common candidates: a first for European elections

The European elections of May 2014 are likely to see every EU political family propose a candidate for the position of President of the Commission. This is partly the result of the Lisbon Treaty, but is a political rather than a legal or institutional decision. The Treaty establishes that the European Council will take into account the results of the elections when nominating the President of the Commission. This means that he or she – but not necessarily the other 27 Commissioners – will belong to the majority of the new Parliament. This has led to all the major EU parties committing to announce a common candidate for the office. This can be seen as bringing the EU closer to a parliamentary democracy where parties structure the competition for office. To date, parties have followed different strategies in terms of nomination dates and procedures.

However, the institutional structure of the EU is still short of that of a usual parliamentary democracy. From a theoretical point of view the candidate of the winning party family may not become the President. This person needs the approval of the Council and, perhaps more importantly, of their own government.

'Youth absenteeism is not a problem specifically for left-side parties … it is more a general trend, a generational problem rather than a problem for only some parties. I firmly disagree with the perception that social democracy is something old-fashioned. Of course we would like to increase support among young people, we're still working on this strategy.' (Interview with a member of the PES.)

Interviewees were asked about their views on the causes of the problem. Most of them highlighted the lack of relevance of EU electoral campaigns, which is consistent with their position that an increased politicisation could make the campaign more relevant:

'People really believe there is nothing at stake, and it will only change if they come to see that actually there is a lot at stake. Thus I am happy that the PES was the first party to announce that we will run the next EU election under a common candidate, because this would be an opportunity to politicise the debate a bit more.' (Interview with an official of the PES.)

Interviewees all agreed that in the next European elections there would be more competition, because all parties would nominate a candidate for the office of the President of the European Commission. Interviewees expected this to have a beneficial impact on young people's voting turnout, because the Presidency personalises and politicises the campaign. When asked whether they felt that European parties had sufficiently differentiated positions towards young people to attract them to the ballot box, most interviewees agreed and said that the field was wide enough for parties' differentiated proposals. Most interviewees acknowledged, however, that EU-level debate on youth issues is blurred by the fact that the policies that affect young people most – education, training and labour market regulation – are decided at the national level.

2.4.2 Issues

The principal problem is the difficulty European political parties have in coordinating European campaigns. All European parties report that their role is to coordinate their national members and establish commonly agreed upon goals and strategies. They equally acknowledge that parties often see elections in a national perspective, and that the European manifestos do not necessarily guide national ones. It is also interesting to note that the questionnaires that national member parties completed for us confirm that they see 2014 as second-order elections, despite the European parties' intentions to Europeanise them.

A second structural issue is the tension between mother parties and their youth branches. Not only are youth issues and young candidates given lower priority than youth branches would like it to be, but also the horizontal emphasis on youth issues within parties has been difficult. Interviewees suggested that most youth organisations see their lobbying of the mother parties, not the mobilisation of young people, as their main function. Could youth organisations transform themselves into flexible organisations that parties see as indispensable to young people's political activism? Some of the interviewees from youth organisations did not agree with the perceived degree of their empowerment and demanded a more prominent role. Few of the mother-party interviewees were able to provide convincing details of concrete steps taken to make the campaign process more participative.

The third problem was young people's disenchantment with political parties. Interviewees argued that, unlike older generations who have established voting preferences, young people do not wish to commit to long-term projects but do want to become involved in specific ones:

'Young people are less inclined to join political parties and to bind themselves into time-consuming long-term work. Younger generations are not apolitical, but tend to prefer clearly defined projects. It is a challenge for parties to identify these projects and to link them to the issues that the party wants to press at the upcoming elections.' (Interview with an official of the ALDE Party.)

2.4.3 Addressing the issues

Empowerment   The interviews showed that the party representatives were aware of the need to engage young people, in particular in relation to the promotion of young people within the party and the use of alternative forms of participation. All European political parties agreed that they must promote more young people as candidates for office. Each of the parties also claimed to be the most likely to nominate the most young candidates, hence raising inter-party competition. That said, all the parties pointed out that in the end it is party members who decide on nominations. All interviewees said they would recommend a higher proportion of candidates between the ages of 18 and 35, but none was able to describe how this could be achieved. Due to the importance of nominating and electing young candidates, interviewees were asked if debates among young candidates were on the agenda; most admitted that this was unlikely to be the case. Only a proposal from the Youth of the European People's Party (YEPP) to host a simulation of the European Parliament in Strasbourg was acknowledged, but had not been accepted.

Openness   Some interviewees referred to the openness of their party in the processes of drafting manifestos and selecting candidates; they claimed to be open to participation by individuals and social groups, as a way of demonstrating that the party was active, not only in trying to gain votes, but also in providing opportunities to participate. How parties differed was in their degree of openness. This openness included: discussions with member parties and individual members; consultations with civil society organisations; open primaries to select the candidate for the Presidency of the European Commission. All parties reported that their youth branches were fully integrated into the process of drafting manifestos and selecting and training young candidates. However, as discussed later, the discussion with youth branches does not necessarily imply an open debate on youth issues, as in several countries youth branches tended to see themselves as intra-party lobbies rather than youth activists.

The selection of party candidates was one of the main ideas in relation to openness, even though only the interviewee from the Greens emphasised the party's commitment to an open primary (to be organised at the European level and in which all voters sympathising with Green policies would be able to vote online[V]). Most of the other interviewees argued that this required the cooperation of national parties and governments, not just the EU parties, which had to agree on this measure. The following shows that the process of selecting candidates is seen not only as an opportunity to open the party to other forms of participation, but also as a way of increasing competition and of attracting attention to the party:

'A democratic procedure has been designed should there be more than one candidate. The procedure will start in October and will be finalised at a congress in February 2014; and because of this the other major political parties are going to do the same thing. It is a wonderful opportunity to try to politicise the debate, which could be a way of slightly increasing the turnout, although it may eventually not work.' (Interview with an official of the PES.)

Policies   Concerning policy development, all parties reported having had contact with organised civil society in the preparation of their 2014 manifestos. However, it is questionable whether these contacts were real openness and to what extent they would mobilise young citizens to participate; one of the criticisms of European civil society organisations is that they tend to be distant from their own grassroots (Kohler-Koch 2010). Furthermore, interviews revealed a surprising neglect of the new instruments of participation recognised in article 11 of the Treaty of the European Union. For instance, none of the interviewees had heard about the two European Citizens' Initiatives that had been launched as part of the Erasmus[VI] programme[VII], despite parties' frequent references to Erasmus in their programmes, and none of the parties had shown interest in the indignados movement. Interestingly, an official of the Greens challenged characterisation of the movement as a youth movement:

'I'm not sure that the indignados movement is a movement of young people. I would be very careful with that classification. You have several other movements, like people who work in healthcare, social care and education who walk on the streets with different colour schemes, and they are not specifically young people. Again, if you look at the movement, which fights against the fact that people are put out of their houses, they are not young people. And for instance young people who are not able to access the job market have not assembled in a specific movement, so I don't think your question is valid.'

Social media   The data on party communications suggest that candidates in the 2009 elections did not totally neglect social media and other internet tools (used by 17.5% of candidates). However, given the limited use of more conventional media (radio, TV) it can be assumed that candidates used social media principally for its cost advantages. The qualitative data gathered from the interviews show that parties' use of social media was far from sophisticated. During an interview, officials of the EPP spoke of their aim to obtain a large audience that would spread its message: 'The EPP is doing very well, we have 140,000 likes, making us the biggest party on Facebook'. No reference was made to the reactivity of the audience, nor the extent to which the party used this medium to interact with its followers. Social media exposure is measured here by the size of the audience rather than by the party's ability to engage in debate and conversation with its followers.

III

THE CAUSES
OF YOUTH ABSENTEEISM
IN EUROPEAN ELECTIONS

This study first looks at this from a theoretical point of view. The starting point is that youth absenteeism challenges the traditional neo-functionalist expectation, especially prevalent in the early days of the EU, that citizens transfer their loyalties from the national to the European level as the latter gains more power (Haas: 1958, 524). Following this logic, generations born in an increasingly integrated Europe and having benefited from borderless experiences, such as the Schengen zone and the Erasmus programme, should show their interest in the process by participating in European elections. However, the evidence shows that this has not happened. It is thus necessary to consider other theoretical approaches.

3.1

RATIONAL CHOICE AND MINIMALIST CONCEPTIONS OF DEMOCRACY

A possible alternative builds on the traditional rational choice analysis, arguing that absenteeism and lack of interest in elections is a rational response by individuals. They think that their vote will not affect electoral outcomes, so decide that the cost of turning up on election day is greater than the expected utility of participation (Downs: 1957, but see Blais: 2000). It is thus expected that voters prefer to devote their time to other issues than to the effort of collecting political information, choosing their preferred parties and candidates, and voting. Young people are often quoted as conforming to this stereotype (Franklin 2004). However, available data for European elections do not support this hypothesis, as young

people are the least likely electors to say they avoid elections in favour of private, family or leisure alternatives (Annex, Figure 1). Other available research on youth absenteeism fails to support the hypothesis of a younger generation uninterested in politics. Rather, research suggests that the younger generations' political engagement has shifted from electoral politics to cause-orientated political action and networking (Norris: 2003). That being said, rational choice approaches may be appropriate to explain political parties' disregard for younger voters. Youth absenteeism creates a vicious circle where parties neglect youth issues and young people react by voting in ever-smaller numbers.

Republican theorists argue that minimalist conceptions of democracy, such as those put forward by rational choice theorists, are at the core of parties' and voters' adaptation to low-intensity democracy (characterised by weak political participation, where political activity is delegated to political representatives chosen in elections at intervals (O'Donnell: 1984)). These theorists also argue that this conception of democracy is rooted in governments offering general and universal welfare policies in exchange for the political demobilisation of citizens (Levi: 1996). For some of these authors, elections themselves have become ritualistic: as parties tend to converge towards the centre (Downs 1957) competition is less on issues of substance and more on the competence of candidates and the marketing ability of parties. This means that the act of voting is less and less one of political participation and can be compared to an act of political consumption, where those who vote choose between different brands of essentially the same product (Barber 2004). This contributes to apathy, dulling people's motivation to turn out. We see this happening with the 'permissive consensus on the EU': citizens show a benign neglect as the EU deals with issues of 'low politics' such as the regulation of the single market.

Youth absenteeism has at least two major consequences for the future of the EU as a democratic polity. First, absenteeism affects the sustainability of democracy. The data tell us that a majority of young people in the EU have massively decided not to be represented in the European Parliament. This creates a divide between citizens and the only directly elected institution in the EU and, thus, is unsustainable from a democratic point of view. Today's young abstainers may well be tomorrow's mature abstainers, creating an even lower overall turnout. Second, youth absenteeism affects EU policymaking. Young people's failure to participate creates a biased representation in the European Parliament, where political dynamics tend to favour older MEPs (Beauvallet, Michon: 2012). Recent concern about the availability of resources for the Erasmus programme (Keating: 2012) suggests that the EU is reproducing bias in policy production, directly affecting the young. Although member states regulate the policy areas with the most obvious influence on young people – education, housing and labour markets – the European integration of fiscal policies, through the governance of the euro area, is likely to further disadvantage this generation, as shown by high rates of youth unemployment.

3.2

Youth absenteeism as an evaluation of the EU

A second interpretation is that absenteeism is in itself a form of political activism and protest. Hirschmann's (1970) analytical scheme illustrates this view, in that dissatisfied citizens can either opt to voice their concern or simply exit the process of voting in the EU. Citizens know that the legitimacy of the political system requires that the majority of the population participate in political decision-making. By consciously deciding not to vote, citizens may well be showing their dissatisfaction with the course of European integration. However, yet again, survey data do not support this hypothesis, as young people are the age group least likely to abstain because of dissatisfaction with the EU (Annex, Figure 4). Recent Eurobarometer data[VIII] suggest that up to 64% of young people are 'likely' to vote in the next European Parliamentary elections in 2014, suggesting a possible protest vote. These

data are, however, to be interpreted with care: first, the difficulty of predicting turnout so far in advance; second, because of inconsistencies with previous results. Ninety percent of those who say they are likely to vote do so because they always vote, whereas we know that up to 40% of young voters who participated in national elections abstained from the European elections. Nevertheless, these results could suggest there is an increasing interest in the EU among young people.

An alternative explanation notes that elections for the European Parliament are seen as second-order elections. Voters have difficulty in seeing what is at stake, and do not see an immediate effect in terms of government formation - European elections are still run in a national context and contested by national political parties. And even the European Parliament's increased power is unlikely to change this dynamic; the euro crisis has confirmed that key decisions are not taken at the European Parliament, but elsewhere. As a consequence, voters abstaining in European elections send a message not to the EU, but to national governments (Teperoglu: 2010). The data show a very strong correlation between voting in national and European elections (Annex, Figure 5). Voters abstaining in national elections are almost certainly going to abstain in EU ones too, meaning that member states also have to assume responsibility for the re-engagement of young voters. Second-order voting and absenteeism have negative consequences beyond European Parliamentary elections: research suggests that they encourage young citizens not to vote, which also depresses turnout in national elections[IX].

Proponents of the second-order election theory also relate youth absenteeism to voters' evaluation of the EU. They argue that turnout is affected by the context of the election, in particular the degree of competition between parties and the competition's perceived effects. The formulation is that because the European Parliament used to have relatively few competencies, voters tend to see these elections as an opportunity to change their political behaviour without visible consequences (Reif and Schmitt: 1980). Considering the relatively modest role of European parties and of the European

Parliament in the management of the euro crisis, there is reason to think that as long as the European Parliament is not at the centre of the EU's political life, turnout will suffer. Recent research shows the perverse effect of second-order voting on young voters: European elections may even be considered one of the causes of youth absenteeism, as young people 'learn' not to vote, which translates into more frequent absenteeism later on in life (Franklin and Hobolt: 2011; Down and Darwin: 2013).

The EU can be understood as a consociational polity – meaning, a polity where the power is shared – which is made up of large coalitions and frequent elite arrangements (Lijphart: 1999). Together with the thin ideological common ground of European parties, it is difficult to imagine a bipolar partisan politicisation of EU political competition. There has been increasing concern in recent decades that consociational polities, with their tendency to compromise, may lead to indifference among voters who do not have a firm political commitment. They may even foster anger against the elites and favour the emergence of populist parties and movements, as several typically consociational polities such as Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium and Austria have shown in the last decade (Rose 2000). In this way, the perception of the second-order nature of European elections can also be associated with the consensual nature of EU politics. Because of their low profile, European elections tend to be biased, because they will attract voters who are more interested in politics and have stronger cultural and social capital (Lijphart: 1997). The competition between the institutions and, in particular, the European Parliament's endeavour to increase its influence in European politics, has created incentives for cooperation between the different groups within it. This favours a cohesive Parliament, giving it a stronger voice versus the Council and the Commission, but fails to provide more visible competition between different political alternatives at the EU level (Costa: 2009). Although the current majority of conservative and liberal parties in the European Parliament and the member states provide support for the hypothesis of an increasing politicisation of the EU, in fact it remains institutionally possible that the majority of Commissioners could belong to

a different political grouping from the majority of European Parliament.

3.3

WEAKENING SOCIALISATION, MISREPRESENTATION AND APATHY

Youth absenteeism can also be approached from a comparative point of view, pointing to the decline in participation by all voters. This suggests that voting patterns are not acquired following key life events, such the start of university education, entry into work or the development of a family, as expected by life cycle theories. The increasing distance of young people from political institutions is thus an expression of a broad transformation in social patterns. We need to view this in relation to changes in political culture and forms of political socialisation in European societies (Torcal 2010; Flanagan et al. 2012). Socialisation, in this context, is the process by which people gain knowledge of political reality in formal educational settings, such as the family, the media and school, as well as through practical experience, such as at the workplace or through membership of youth, political and trade union organisations.

The problem of absenteeism in European elections starts at the national level: the most significant predictor of absenteeism in European elections is absenteeism at the national level (Annex, Figure 10). This correlation shows that most who abstain from national elections also abstain from European elections. Thus, youth absenteeism in European elections is related to a disconnection between young people and representative politics in general and is, to a large extent, also a reflection of political socialisation deficits.

There are other socialisation deficits; for example, the decline in party membership and trust in parties. The extent to which young people are close to, or distant from, political parties has a clear effect on absenteeism, which is more generalised among those who do not feel attached to political parties and also those in the centre of the political spectrum (Annex, Figures 11-13). Voters who are strongly attached to a political party, or who have a clearly defined ideology, vote in higher proportions. Distrust of political parties is generalised among young voters (79%), but this does not seem to be a decisive factor in their likelihood to participate in politics (Annex, Figure 12). Those who distrust parties tend to abstain from elections, but those who do trust parties still do not vote in very high numbers. Even if trust in parties does not guarantee participation, distrust towards them tends to do so.

One of the aspects of young people's alienation from politics is related to the difficulty in obtaining political information. Access to political information about European elections, including exposure to information about the campaign, appears to positively, and significantly, contribute to participation (Down and Wilson: 2013). Eurobarometer also provides data on young people's exposure to political information and their attitudes towards parties. Exposure to information about the campaign, and memory of this information, had a significant effect on young people's likelihood of participating in the election (Annex, Figure 18).

There are also good reasons to think that youth absenteeism is actually related to what the UK Electoral Commission in its 2002 study calls apathy (The Electoral Commission: 2002, 21) which creates a disconnect between the issues discussed in politics and the way in which young voters perceive the representation of their interests. The younger generation is disproportionally affected by the economic and social crisis (International Trade Union Confederation: 2012) because of the structure of employment markets and national welfare policies, often designed to protect those who have worked for a long time rather than those newly entering the labour market, creating a generational divide. The younger generation's increased precarity, particularly job insecurity, weakens family and community ties, making young people's life prospects more uncertain than that of their parents (Henn, Weinstein and Wring: 2002). The fact that young people are voting in smaller proportions than other age groups 'has important ramifications for underprivileged young people in our

Case study: Spanish political elite and the 'indignados'

On 15 May 2011, young people in Spain took to the streets. An unexpectedly large demonstration was followed by a surprise occupation of la Puerta del Sol, Madrid's central square. This movement had high visibility in Spanish politics because it coincided with an election campaign, its similarities with the Tahrir square occupation, and its demand for mainly political reform. The movement demanded constitutional reforms to make Spanish democracy more transparent and to increase social control over political parties and institutions.

The '15 Movement' is undoubtedly a form of young people's politics, in that most activists were aged 19-30. The fact that demands concentrated almost exclusively on political reforms, rather than on youth problems, is a further sign of the transformation of political activism among young people.

The political elite reacted negatively. First, the movement was suspected of trying to influence the election result, or even of promoting absenteeism. However, the movement never called for participation, nor absenteeism nor support for one party or another, although it was clearly much more sympathetic towards smaller parties than to the principal parties.

Second, the movement was associated with citizens' increasing distrust towards political parties. Parties reacted by claiming to be the only legitimate form of involvement in politics. There were several examples where parties and institutions contested the legitimacy of the political pressure they had been under. In a telling discussion, the Secretary General of the Popular Party told activists that if they wished to participate in politics they should create their own party.

societies, who lack any real voice in electoral politics, so can be (and often have been) ignored, victimised or even vilified by politicians and policy-makers' (Sloam: 2013, 17). In ageing societies, the absenteeism of young voters means that their interests are not as well represented as those of older generations. The votes that actually decide elections tend to be those of older, not those of younger, people and the interests of these decisive voters are more likely to be better represented in state spending and welfare policies (Lynch: 2007).

3.4

Parties are out of touch with young people's preferred forms of activism

Interviewees' arguments about young people's distrust are consistent with research indicating their preference for different forms of political activism. Party political membership has declined to the point that political parties have become virtually irrelevant social organisations (Van Biezen, Mair and Poguntke: 2012). The structures of political parties in Europe once contributed to political socialisation by encompassing their affiliates' lives, from cradle to grave; today, most parties have abandoned such a function in favour of election-winning techniques, which emphasise mediated and professionalised communication rather than the direct mobilisation of constituencies. Although 'catch-all parties' competing at the centre of the political spectrum find these techniques particularly useful, these strategies produce a negative side-effect: parties lose contact with society and, as a consequence, neglect activities contributing to young people's political socialisation. Some argue that the institutionalisation of political parties via States' increasingly detailed regulation (Whiteley: 2011) have enabled parties to transform the nature of their political strength and to become relatively

independent of their supporters and civil society in general (Katz, Mair: 2009).

Even though the EU and several member states have developed democratic innovations introducing forms of participatory democracy (Smith 2009, Geissel 2012), these have been used experimentally and insulated from politics, in that parties have rarely been actively pursuing these new forms of participation and activism. An example is the party officials we interviewed who, despite the importance of the Erasmus programme for the socialisation of young people, had not had any contact with the promoters of two European Citizens' Initiatives on the subject. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that democratic innovations are not translating into higher electoral turnout. It is important that parties and institutions engage more with these forms of activism, as research shows that the younger generations' political engagement has shifted from electoral politics to cause-orientated political action and networking (Norris 2003, Sloam 2013). These forms of activism are particularly interesting in that they can cut across social exclusion-led absenteeism: 'Young people from the poorest backgrounds participate more than those from the richest backgrounds (and above the average for all young people) in four types of political activity: working for a party or action group, displaying a badge or sticker, joining a boycott and participating in a demonstration' (Sloam 2013: 17).

Political parties are sometimes conceptualised as cartel parties that are increasingly socially irrelevant because of their declining membership (Katz and Mair: 2009) they remain the main, and virtually only, agents of political participation, democratic will formation, elite selection and policy formulation in most European democracies. This means that new forms of activism are unlikely to replace the role of parties in the foreseeable future. Furthermore, these alternative modes of political activism are disconnected from electoral politics and thus do not contribute to electoral turnout. Parties thus need to engage more with these forms of political involvement as a way of channelling them into electoral turnout and in order to ensure their relevance as society-based organisations.

Stronger links between party life and alternative forms of participation could bring parties back in touch with young people. However, the research interviews carried out for this study demonstrate that while European political parties are aware of this change, they have yet to find a way of acting upon it. A case study (Calvo, Gómez-Pastrana, Mena: 2011) about the attitude of the Spanish political establishment towards the demands of the 'indignados' movement shows that national political parties consider their own activities as the only legitimate political realm and show suspicion of alternative forms of political action.

IV

RECOMMENDATIONS

Acting on absenteeism by young people in European elections is complex. On the one hand, the EU has a distinct problem in relation to youth absenteeism, as European elections are affected more than local and national elections. On the other, the EU cannot act on this problem alone, as it is not the only, and probably not the main, reason for youth absenteeism. Acting on the issue in European elections is a shared responsibility for EU institutions, member states and political parties at both national and EU levels. It also requires reforms of both institutions and the conduct of political competition if the EU, as a democratic polity, and political parties as socially relevant organisations, are to survive. Based on the evidence and arguments in this study, and elsewhere, the following changes are recommended in three main areas.

4.1

EMPOWERING YOUNG PEOPLE THROUGH PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION

Young people are under-represented in politics. Because fewer young people vote, political parties nominate few young candidates, which means that few young people are actually elected to Parliament, and supposedly representative institutions produce biased results, focusing less on young people's interests.

RECOMMENDATION 1:
Member states should propose a quota on party MEP candidates: 25% should be aged under 35

European parties and member states should commit to achieving a level of representation of young people that is in proportion to the ration of young people in the European population. Member states should propose a quota on the number of young candidates in party candidacies. Young people are 25% of the population of the EU, so a quota of 25% reflects their share of the EU population. This quota is particularly justified considering the tendency to under-elect young candidates.

RECOMMENDATION 2:
Replace the existing methods of selecting candidates for election with open primaries

Young people are developing a preference for different forms of political activism and participation, such as demonstrating, volunteering in associations and socialising and expressing political opinions through digital media. Because other forms of collective political action are not likely to replace political parties soon, it is important that parties remain the centre of political participation. For the parties' own survival, they need to consider young people's preference for alternative forms of political activism. More legitimate and efficient forms of aggregating preferences in a democracy than elections have yet to be found, but alternative forms of participation could become complementary forms of political engagement, contributing to the socialisation of young people into politics.

Despite the problems that primary elections pose for the political systems of EU member states, there is evidence that young people have a preference for this form of candidate selection and parties should thus at least experiment. Parties need to open up part of their internal processes to society, not only members, and change their internal culture to promote the open exchange of ideas within the party and with society. This requires the usage of open primaries and online and offline interaction with young activists and organised civil society. How manifestos are prepared and the way of campaigning should also stop being an internally focused process, and be open to young activists. All parties should engage in open and public debates with young citizens from outside their organisation in the run-up to the election.

4.2

ENGAGING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

Parties need to address youth disengagement from politics. Regardless of the type of manifesto, what all parties do is ignore youth issues. In one form or another, parties need to show concern about the effects of EU integration on young people and to propose ways of addressing this. This is not a call for the division of manifestos into separate offers for different sections of the population, as this could be a way to further increase the marginalisation of youth issues.

RECOMMENDATION 3:
Include youth issues clearly in party manifestos without 'ghettoising'

Parties need to formulate their political project for young people in the EU, responding to questions such as: do we need more or less solidarity? More or less flexibility in the labour market? In doing so, they should also address long-term questions, such as specific causes of youth social exclusion or the changing demographic structure of our societies. These two issues are important for inter-generational solidarity and the sustainability of pension systems, showing how an increased attention to youth issues can contribute to drafting a political programme that is relevant for the whole of society.

RECOMMENDATION 4:
Target key groups of young people: students, the socially excluded and first time voters

Parties have grown used to competing in national and European elections without considering or featuring the voices of young people. Their manifestos pay lip service to the democratic deficit of youth absenteeism, but do not see it as something affecting their electoral prospects. They have grown used to

competing for the votes of older generations and see the absenteeism from voting by young people as negative for democracy in the EU, but too difficult to address. They do not see a sufficiently important gain to change their behaviour and, as a result, the generally desired outcome is unlikely to be produced.

This is a short-sighted strategy; there are clear gains to be obtained from a campaign that targets young people's groups. The availability of political information has shown to influence young people's likelihood to vote, making it rational for parties to make that effort.

RECOMMENDATION 5:
Broadcast a high profile youth-focused TV debate among top candidates of the European elections, such as between the candidates nominated by the European political parties for the position of President of the European Commission;

The European institutions should provide economic and infrastructure support to the parties and youth civil society organisations to come together and partner with broadcasters to organise a cross-partisan high profile TV debate between the main candidates of the European elections focused on issues of interest to young people. Research by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, based on YouGov survey data, showed that the 2010 debates in the UK helped ensure that a special relationship [was formed among 18- to 24-year-olds] with the TV debates compared with more jaded older people. 74% of first-time voters said they had learned something, and 55% of the 18- to 24-year-olds surveyed said it had helped them make up their minds on voting. Such a debate would focus on issues of interest to and relevant to the every day lives of young people, and should include a high level of interactivity with young people through social media channels.

RECOMMENDATION 6:
Use social media to engage and network with the audience, instead of repeating slogans

Many of the current methods of campaigning fail either to reach, or to attract, young people. Yet it is self-evident that the young enthusiastically tap into and engage with enormously powerful communications methods, developed during the digital revolution, on a daily basis. Yet political parties scarcely scratch the surface of using the potential of such methods to communicate with the young.

Rather than simply reproduce the same message time and time again on social networks, parties must engage in a dialogue with party supporters and activists, who in turn would contribute to grassroots campaigns and communication relays between peers and within their close networks.

4.3

BRINGING YOUNG PEOPLE INTO PARTY AND EUROPEAN POLITICS

It is clear that after the 2014 campaign, much work is required to continue to bring young people into European politics and political activism if the EU is to be a sustainable democratic polity. Political systems have used different measures, with varying degrees of success, to attract young voters. European elections would benefit from introducing some of these innovations. Civic and political education differs from one member state to the next. European integration is not clearly or systematically written into social science, history or civic education textbooks, regardless of the member state where such textbooks are produced or taught from. Sweden is the country where young people are least likely to abstain in European elections. This is one of the countries where civic education portfolios cover EU membership and where pupils show the highest knowledge on EU issues.

RECOMMENDATION 7:
Integrate the history and role of the EU into national educational systems

An earlier focus on the EU will help mitigate young voters' view of European elections as second-order. The goal must be to inform young citizens of the importance of considering, favourably or not, the EU in their political decision-making. In this exercise, cooperation with youth organisations should be sought. Complementary citizenship education, as in youth organisations, leads to a development of skills, knowledge, and attitudes usually not acquired through the formal education system.

RECOMMENDATION 8:
Simplify the process of voting

Voting systems and rules vary widely among member states. Some have voter registration requirements, while others automatically register voters. Voting days and times change from voting on working days or weekends and can take place over more than one day. Regardless of the system, simplicity and user-friendliness increase young people's electoral turnout.

RECOMMENDATION 9:
Lower the voting age for European elections

Member states should innovate in the legislation of European elections. They should be encouraged to use automatic voter registration systems, to increase the number of voting stations to reduce waiting times, to poll at the weekend and to develop secure online-voting systems. Lower the voting age for European elections appears counter-intuitive: data suggest that it is the youngest of the young voters who are more likely to abstain in European elections. However, countries that have lowered the voting age have seen positive returns in voter turnout, such as Austria where the voting age was lowered to 16. This however needs to go hand in hand with recommendation 7 on comprehensive citizenship education.

NOTES

I   Own elaboration on the basis of IDEA turnout database (http://www.idea.int/vt/) for EU member states parliamentary elections since 1980. The thick red line indicates average participation in EU member states in every election. Belgium, Cyprus, Luxembourg and Greece are excluded because of the practice of compulsory voting. For the sake of comparability, all elections in EU member states from 1980 to 2013 have been numbered from 1 to 11, with 1 being the first election held since 1980.

II   The data were downloaded from the PIREDEU (Providing an Infrastructure for Research on Electoral Democracy in the European Union) project website. EES (2009), European Parliament Election Study 2009, Candidate Study and Euromanifesto Study: ‹http://www.piredeu.eu/public/Publications.asp›.

III   According to Eurostat data, available from: ‹http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/population/data/database›.

IV   The roundtable took place on the 5th November 2013 at the European Parliament Information Office to Belgium in Brussels. It included a presentation of the study's findings thus far, followed by a panel discussion on its recommendations made of representatives of the four largest European political parties (European People's Party, Party of European Socialists, Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) Party, and the European Greens). The audience consisted of civil society, European Institution officials and young activists.

V   The vote took place on the following website: https://www.greenprimary.eu/

VI   The Erasmus Programme is an EU exchange student programme that has been in existence since the late 1980. Its purpose is to provide foreign exchange options for students from within the European Union and it involves many of the best universities and seats of learning on the continent.

VII   Available at the following websites: Fraternity 2020 http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/initiatives/obsolete/details/2012/000001?lg=en and Teach for youth http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/initiatives/ongoing/details/2013/000005

VIII   May 2013 Flash Eurobarometer 375, "European youth: participation in democratic life", p. 21

IX   Franklin, Mark N and Hobolt, Sara B. (2011) "The legacy of lethargy. How elections to the European Parliament depress turnout", in: Electoral Studies 30(1), pp. 67-76.

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ANNEXES

Figure 3 Youth abstention per social self-perception

lowest level in society	%	Voted	Did not vote	%		%	Voted	Did not vote	%	
Box 1	31,9			68,1		38,9			61,1	Box 6
Box 2	29,6			70,4		44,1			55,9	Box 7
Box 3	27,5			72,5		44,6			55,4	Box 8
Box 4	28,1			71,9		40			60	Box 9
Box 5	32,9			67,1		29,6			70,4	Box 10

highest level in society

Figure 4 Youth abstention per professional categories

	%	Voted	Did not vote	%
Farmer / fisherman	54,3			45,7
Middle management, etc.	52,8			47,2
Employed professional (employed doctor, etc.)	51,6			48,4
Fisherman	50			50
General management, etc.	50			50
Owner of a shop, craftsmen, etc.	46,2			53,8
Employed position, at desk	45,9			54,1
Professional (lawyer, etc.)	45,1			54,9
Supervisor	44,2			55,8
Business proprietors, etc.	43,3			56,7
Retired, unable to work	40,4			59,6
Employed position, travelling	38,1			61,9
Employed position, service job	35,5			64,5
Skilled manual worker	35,2			64,8
Responsible for ordinary shopping, etc.	32,9			67,1
Unemployed, temporarily not working	32,2			67,8
Unskilled manual worker, etc.	29,6			70,4
Student	27,6			72,4

Figure 5 Youth abstention per age of leaving education

	%	Voted	Did not vote	%
Up to 14 years	36,4			63,6
15 years	27			73
16 years	28,1			71,9
17 years	36			64
18 years	34,7			65,3
19 years	38,7			61,3
20 years	42,3			57,7
21 years	39			61
22 years and older	50,7			49,3
Still studying	27,6			72,4
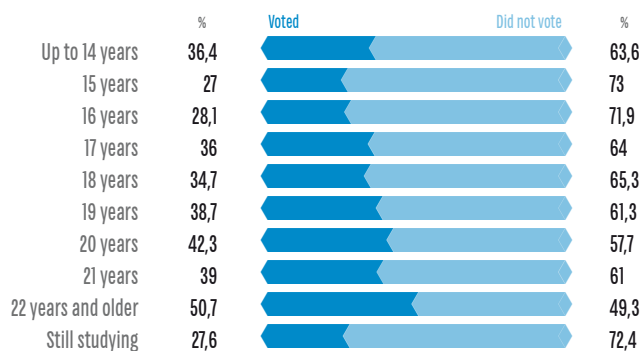
Figure 6 Abstention by type of community

		15 - 24 years				25 - 34 years		%
	%	Voted	Did not vote	%	%	Voted	Did not vote	57,5
Rural area or village	30,1			69,9	42,5			60,4
Small/middle town	26,9			73,1	39,6			56,2
Large town	28,4			71,6	43,8			
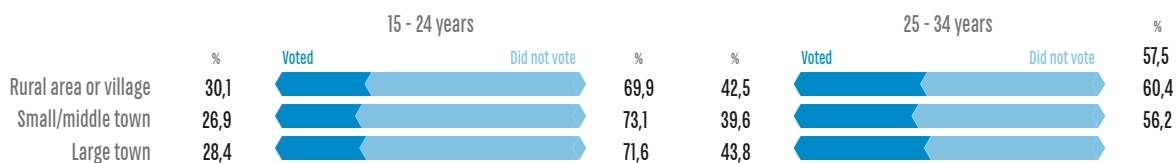
Figure 7 Youth abstention per member state[1]

	%	Voted	Did not vote	%
France	24,7			75,3
Belgium*	65			35
The Netherlands	34,7			65,3
Germany West	38,8			61,2
Italy	40,6			59,4
Luxembourg*	44,7			55,3
Denmark	54,9			45,1
Ireland	54,7			45,3
United Kingdom	18			82
Greece**	33,2			66,8
Spain	27,8			72,2
Portugal	31,6			68,4
Germany East	39,3			60,7
Finland	30,3			69,7
Sweden	58,9			41,1
Austria	38,7			61,3
Cyprus (Rep)*	26,8			73,2
Czech Republic	27,5			72,5
Estonia	36,6			63,4
Latvia	41,8			58,2
Lithuania	19,6			80,4
Malta	50,4			49,6
Poland	23,8			76,2
Slovakia	34,9			65,1
Slovenia	19,3			80,7
Bulgaria	42,2			57,8
Romania	34,5			65,5

1   *Compulsory voting, **Compulsory voting not enforced

Figure 8 Differences in abstention rates between young and general population

	%			%
The Netherlands	25,2	Greece	13,1
France	20,5	Latvia	13,1
United Kingdom	20,5	Sweden	10,4
Cyprus (Republic)	18	Poland	9,9
Finland	16,4	Austria	9,6
Estonia	15,9	Malta	9,2
Slovenia	15,7	Germany East	8,8
Ireland	15,3	Luxembourg	7,8
Bulgaria	14,9	Czech Republic	7,8
Germany West	14,3	Hungary	7,8
Lithuania	14,3	Italy	6,3
Spain	13,9	Belgium	6,1
Romania	13,5	Slovakia	5,7
Denmark	13,4	Portugal	2
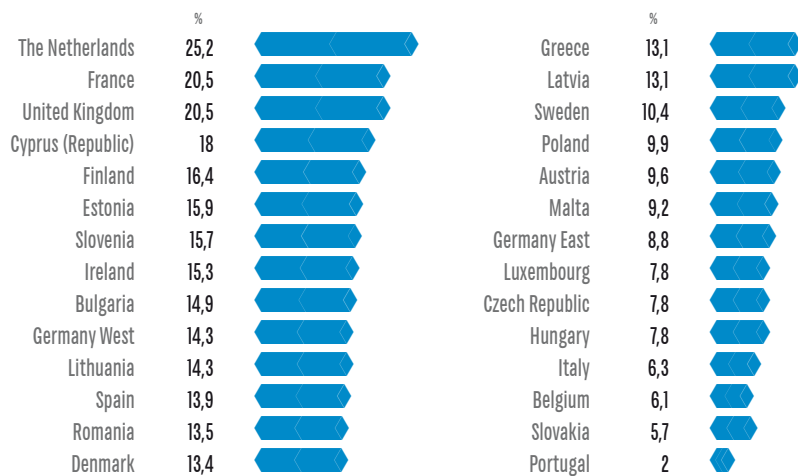
Table 1 Leisure and family

Age group	No mention of family / leisure	Abstention because of family / leisure	N
15 - 24 years	96,1	3,9	100
25 - 34 years	91,9	8,1	100
35 - 44 years	92,9	7,1	100
45 - 54 years	95,1	4,9	100
55 - 64 years	94,4	5,6	100
65 years and older	96,9	3,1	100
Total	94,5	5,5	100

Figure 9 Percentage of citizens by age group who abstained because of dissatisfaction with the EU

	%
15-24 years	14
25-34 years	26
35-44 years	29
45-54 years	34
55-64 years	35
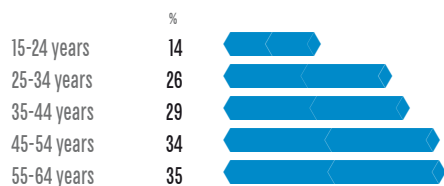
Figure 10 Abstention of young voters (16–35) in national and EU elections

Voted National elections

55,1 %

55,1 %	44,9 %
Voted EU	Did not Vote EU

Did not vote national elections

13,5 %

13,5 %	86,5 %
Voted EU	Did not Vote EU
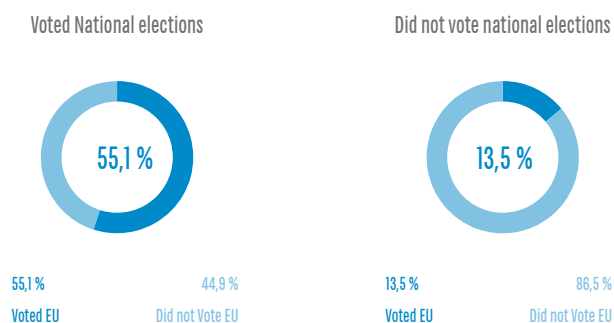
Figure 11 Youth abstention per degrees of distance to parties

	15 - 24 years			25 - 34 years		
	%	Voted / Did not vote	%	%	Voted / Did not vote	%
Yes, very close	61,6		38,4	76,7		23,3
Yes, somewhat close	49		51	61,2		38,8
No, not really close	33,5		66,5	40,8		59,2
No, not close at all	10,4		89,6	15,8		84,2
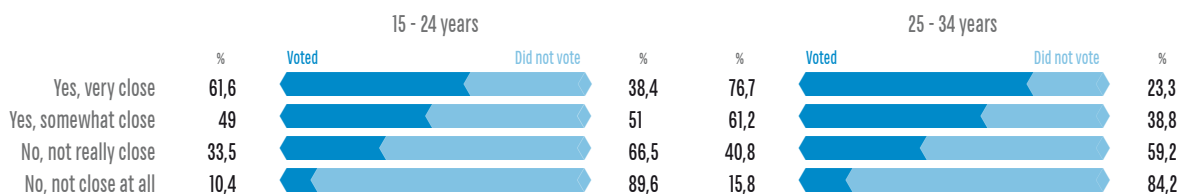
Figure 12 Youth abstention and trust in parties

Tend to trust

48,6 %

48,6 %	51,4 %
Voted EU	Did not Vote EU

Tend not to trust

33,4 %

33,4 %	66,6 %
Voted EU	Did not Vote EU
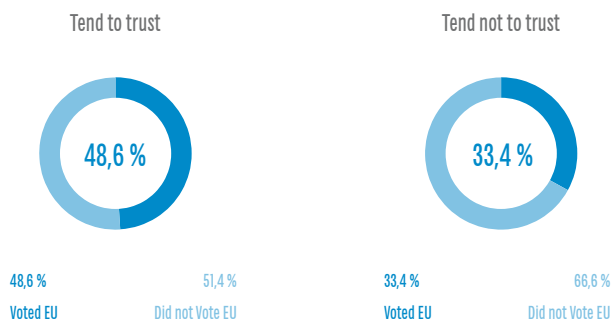
Figure 13 Ideology and abstention

	%	Voted	Did not vote	%
Left (1 - 2)	54,4			45,6
(3 - 4)	48,5			51,5
Centre (5 - 6)	35,3			64,7
(7 - 8)	51,1			48,9
Right (9 -10)	58			42
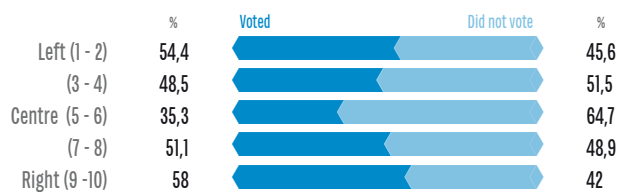
Figure 14 Are you a member of the party that nominated you?

		%	Yes	No	%
[1]	<25 years old	91,84			8,1
[2]	25-34 years old	95,63			3,40
[3]	35-44 years old	93,75			5,86
[4]	45-54 years old	92,22			7,78
[5]	55-64 years old	91,38			7,69
[6]	>64 years old	88,70			8,70
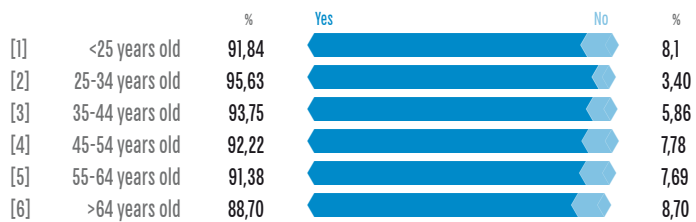
Figure 15 Candidates under 35 by political family

		%	
[1]	ecologists	20	
[2]	communists	21,98	
[3]	socialists	11,8787	
[4]	liberals	24,57	
[5]	christian democrats	17,04	
[6]	conservatives	11,11	
[7]	nationalists	13,85	
[8]	centre/agrarian	20	
[9]	ethnic/linguistic	17,21	

Figure 16 Importance of representation of younger generation

		%	
[1]	<25 years old	63,27	
[2]	25-34 years old	42,23	
[3]	35-44 years old	35,16	
[4]	45-54 years old	35,00	
[5]	55-64 years old	31,38	
[6]	>64 years old	39,13	
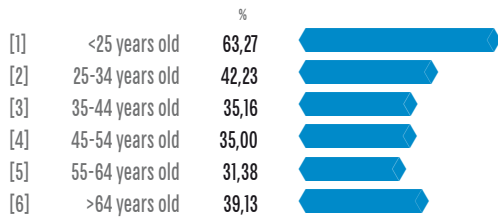
Figure 17 Usage of communication tools by 2009 election candidates

	%	Yes	No	%
Online chat	20,24			67,13
Social Media	49,75			38,83
Weblog	33,95			54,06
Podcasts	28,55			58,82
Webpage designed by the candidate	29,76			58,88
Webpage designed by the party	39,91			48,54
Party brochures used for the election campaign?	76,80			14,40
Personal radio commercials	8,19			67,32
Personal spots TV	8,76			66,69
Personal newspaper ads	21,95			59,58
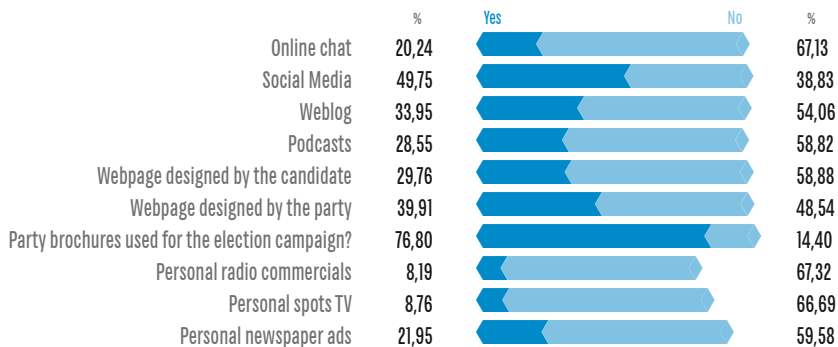
Figure 18 Abstention percentage and memory of the electoral campaign

Yes, remember

No, don't remember

40,8 %

26,8 %

| 40,8 % | 59,2 % | 26,8 % | 73,2 % |
| Voted | Did not vote | Vote | Did not vote |
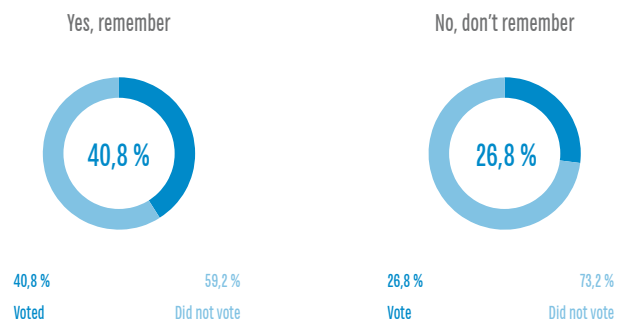
Figure 19 Party membership 2002-2010: young people and total population (%)[2]

2002	2004	2006	2008	2010	
5,8	5,3	5,3	4,6	4,2	Rest population
3	3,1	3	3,1	2,7	Young population
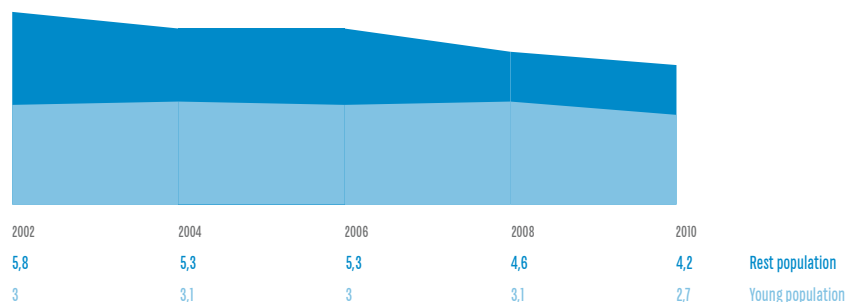
2   European social survey data 2002-2010: R Jowell and the Central Co-ordinating Team, European Social Survey 2002/2003: Technical Report, London: Centre for Comparative Social Surveys, City University (2003); R Jowell and the Central Co-ordinating Team, European Social Survey 2004/2005: Technical Report, London: Centre for Comparative Social Surveys, City University (2005); R Jowell and the Central Co-ordinating Team, European Social Survey 2006/2007: Technical Report, London: Centre for Comparative Social Surveys, City University (2007); European Social Survey (2010 - forthcoming). ESS Round 4 (2008/2009) Final Activity Report. London: Centre for Comparative Social Surveys, City University London; European Social Survey (2012 - forthcoming). ESS Round 5 (2010/2011) Technical Report. London: Centre for Comparative Social Surveys, City University London

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PES, *People First: A New Direction for Europe*, 31 pages

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VVD, For a Working Europe, VVD 2009 Manifesto
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Centerpartiet, *Europas förenta krafter Valmanifest till europaparlamentsvalet 2009*, 7 pages
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Miljöpartiet de Gröna, *2009 Valmanifest Grönt klimatval*, 4 pages

List of interviews and questionnaires

- Interview with two members of the EPP, 22nd May 2013, Brussels
- Interview with a member of ALDE, 22nd May 2013, Brussels
- Interview with two members of the PES, 28th May 2013, Brussels
- Interview with a member of YES, 28th May 2013, Brussels
- Interview with a member of YEPP, 30th May 2013, Brussels
- Interview with a member of the Green youth, 18th June 2013, Brussels
- Interview with a member of the European Greens, 18th June 2013, Brussels
- Interview with a member of the Indignados movement, 24th June, Madrid
- Questionnaire from Moderaterna (Sweden)
- Questionnaire from Partido Popular (Spain)
- Roundtable with 4 representatives of European political parties and party youth branches, 5th November 2013, Brussels

List of topics
addressed in semi-structured interviews and questionnaires

- What is your perception of the causes of young abstention, both individually and as a member of your [party, institution]?
- What is the political offer of the EU for the youth?
- Are there enough young representatives in the EU? How does your [party, organisation] select young candidates?
- Which issues should the EU address in relation to the concerns of young citizens?
- Is there a clearly differentiated offer in relation to youth policies in the EU? What are the issues your [party, organisation] will address in the next campaign?
- How does your [party, organisation] target young voters in EU elections?
- Are there other forms in which the EU can open up channels of participation for young people?

THE LEAGUE OF YOUNG VOTERS IN EUROPE

The League of Young Voters in Europe is a politically neutral initiative that aims to amplify young people's concerns and expectations in the run-up to European elections. The purpose of the LYV is to address the ever-decreasing participation of young people in European elections. The League exists both at the European level, engaging with European political parties and campaigns in Brussels, and also nationally and locally, supported by the European Youth Forum's network of youth organisations. The League of Young Voters in Europe pools the skills of its three founding organisations (the European Youth Forum, VoteWatch Europe, and the International Debate Education Association) and its partners that together are concerned with youth issues and political representation. More information can be found on its website:
   http://www.youngvoters.eu

THE EUROPEAN YOUTH FORUM

The European Youth Forum is the platform of youth organisations in Europe. Independent, democratic, and youth-led, it represents 99 national youth councils and international youth organisations from across Europe. More information can be found on its website:
   http://www.youthforum.org

INTERNATIONAL IDEA

International IDEA is an intergovernmental organization that supports sustainable democracy worldwide. Its objective is to strengthen democratic institutions and processes.

The Institute acts as a catalyst for democracy building by providing knowledge resources and policy proposals or by supporting democratic reforms in response to specific national requests. It works together with policy makers, governments, UN agencies and regional organizations engaged in the field of democracy building. International IDEA's key areas of expertise are: Electoral Processes, Political Parties, Constitution-building processes, Democracy and Development Democracy Assessments. The key cross-cutting themes in this work are Democracy and Gender, Democracy and Diversity, and Democracy, Conflict and Security.

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   http://www.idea.int