



Wilfried  
**Martens Centre**  
for European Studies

YOUTH OF THE EPP

# 25 Years on the Right Side of History

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## Credits

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## Background: The Path to founding YEPP

On 21 January 1997, almost 300 people representing 42 youth political organisations gathered for a weekend of debate and discussion at the Facultés Universitaires Saint-Louis in Brussels. The event would become the Founding Congress of the Youth of the European People's Party (YEPP) and was the final step in a long journey towards building a single European umbrella organisation for the youth of Christian Democratic and Conservative parties affiliated with the European People's Party (EPP).

The Foundation Congress was the culmination of a long process between representatives of two organisations: the European Young Christian Democrats (EYCD) and the Democratic Youth Community of Europe (DEMYC). EYCD was the youth organisation of the European Union of Christian Democrats (EUCD) while DEMYC was the youth organisation of the European Democratic Union (EDU).

Co-operation between centre-right European youth can already be observed in the framework of *Nouvelles Équipes Internationales* (NEI) in early post-World War II Europe. The Jeunes des NEI, founded in 1948, would later become the *Union des Jeunes Démocrates Chrétiens des NEI* and then the *Union Internationale des Jeunes DC-section Europe*.

As would become the case with YEPP, its two predecessor organisations were the culmination of various development iterations. For EYCD, the path to its creation began in 1967, following the creation of the *Union Européenne des Jeunes Démocrates Chrétiens* (EUCD). As many of EUCD's members came from countries outside the then European Community (EU), *la Commission pour l'Intégration Européenne* – later the Committee of the Nine and, following the 1981 accession of Greece, the Committee of the Ten – was formed to address specific community-related issues. This forum would become the most important

arena for cooperation among European Christian Democrats. In 1984 it merged with the EUCD, and EYCD was formed.

While DEMYC was founded in the early 1970s, it was not until 1978 that DEMYC's mother parties built on the existing links and formed the European Democrat Union (EDU), a European-wide association of Conservative and centre-right political parties. DEMYC became a permanent observer of EDU assemblies in 1979 and took an active role in creating the International Young Democrat Union (IYDU). In contrast to EYCD's tendency to limit membership to Christian Democratic organisations, DEMYC counted conservative and even liberal member parties among its ranks.

By the 1980s, it had become clear that the continued existence of two separate organisations with broadly similar objectives, values, membership and functions was serving to weaken both. Not only was this a waste of money and resources, but it was also creating arbitrary divides in both organisations. In EYCD, an alliance of so-called “pure” Christian Democratic youth organisations not members of DEMYC had formed. They often worked to oppose initiatives spearheaded by representatives of both. Within DEMYC, a distinction could be made between EYCD members and those that were not members of EYCD. Moreover, according to Fredrik Reinfeldt, then president of DEMYC and later the first YEPP president, a conflict was brewing between those who advocated an anti-European line – such as the British Young Conservatives – and those who supported more European integration.

By the early 1990s, both DEMYC and EYCD had reached different points of crisis and faced difficult decisions about how to proceed. DEMYC was struggling for relevance. Its reluctance to support further European integration had created distance between them and EPP, which was furthered by EYCD's designation as the official EPP youth organisation. In contrast, EYCD had developed a positive working relationship with EPP which was reflected in the election of then EYCD Secretary General Marc Bertrand as an EPP Vice President. However, this positivity would not endure. Around this time, EPP President Wilfried

Martens and Secretary General Klaus Welle sought to modernise EPP by welcoming conservative and other centre-right parties from newer EU member states into the organisation. Friction emerged when EYCD Christian Democrats from the Benelux countries, Italy and Ireland, moved to oppose the decision.

This coalition of 'small' organisations (the implosion of the Italian Christian Democratic party in the early 1990s must be remembered) stood against the 'bigger' organisations that happened to be members of DEMYC. Tensions grew until, in 1994, at the EYCD Congress in Bogensee, near Berlin, the 'larger' organisations, including the German *Junge Union* (JU) and the Spanish *Nuevas Generaciones* (NNGG), suspended their participation. They criticised EYCD for not being representative enough and for acting too much in favour of the 'smaller' organisations. In other words, it was criticised for not adjusting to the expanding nature of the EU that many of its member organisations were supportive of.

The paralysis within EYCD was now complete. For the "pure" Christian Democrats, it was clear that without the bigger organisations, such as JU and NNGG, EYCD would quickly lose its credibility. For an organisation such as JU, which defined itself as the youth organisation of a People's Party with both Christian Democratic and Conservative roots, it was unthinkable not to be part of an association of Christian Democratic or Conservative youth organisations. Their view was that Christian Democrats and Conservatives should not be split but join forces at the European level and stay 'united by one conviction', according to former Board member Markus Pösentrup. In the same period, the British Young Conservatives left DEMYC because they felt it had become "too European" and "too federal", which also helped DEMYC's move towards European integration.

Developments within the EPP accelerated the process of uniting the two disparate organisations. Upon his election as EPP Secretary General in 1994, Klaus Welle held a clear conviction that young Conservatives and Christian Democrats should work together. Through EPP's political

bureau, Welle proposed that associations of EPP could only remain recognised as such if they were open to all national associations of EPP. This forced EYCD's hand, as they had until now not been open to all of the youth associations of EPP member parties. Preserving their status as an official EPP youth organisation meant beginning negotiations with DEMYC<sup>1</sup>. Welle's experience meant he was ideally positioned to bridge the gap between the two organisations, having served as DEMYC President and as an EYCD Board member. As an indication of how hostile relations between the two could be, his election as DEMYC President was viewed as something of a scandal in EYCD circles, and he was asked to resign from the EYCD board. It was also somewhat humorous that one of Welle's first acts as EPP Secretary General was to reject a letter that he himself had written on behalf of DEMYC requesting they be recognised as EPP's second official youth organisation. This rejection was accompanied by a recommendation from Welle that JU leaves DEMYC and remains active in a single EPP-youth organisation.

With EPP's support, the Political Bureau of EYCD and the Executive Committee of DEMYC established an EYCD/DEMYC Joint Working Group in 1995. This Working Group was tasked with examining future cooperation methods at the European level. The idea was to bring together the best of both worlds, not to impose a single membership on the various national youth organisations. The Working Group met in January, April, May and July 1996. At the same time, discussions took place in the Executive Committee of DEMYC and the Political Bureau of EYCD. It soon became clear that all sides could agree to work towards establishing a broad umbrella organisation of Christian Democratic, Conservative and other centre-right youth organisations. In other words, in the first half of 1996, preparations for the foundation of a new association took place alongside negotiations between DEMYC and EYCD. A consensus was established for a 'Declaration

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<sup>1</sup> Welle K., Interview conducted via Zoom on 13/12/2022.

on the Basic Values and Principles' and on the statutes of the new organisation. Based on these documents, an inaugural congress was to be convened.

In the second half of 1996, the national member organisations of DEMYC and EYCD were informed. In a letter dated 21 July 1996 and signed by Fredrik Reinfeldt, Winfried Weck and Matthias Peterlik on behalf of DEMYC, and Sandro Brodbeck, Brian Murphy, Valentin Hajdinjal and Marc Bertrand on behalf of EYCD, the founders of the new organisation, named the Youth of the European People's Party (YEPP), made it clear what was at stake. They wrote: *'The results of our work are by nature a compromise. It is impossible in a negotiation such as this to satisfy in all respects the demands of every organisation. (...) The creation of YEPP and the decision over whether to join is ultimately one for each national or regional organisation. We firmly believe the package we have negotiated offers the best prospect for success.'*

A general consultation in November 1996 in Brussels with all the members of both organisations proved very successful. A discussion took place based on three documents: the Declaration on the Basic Values and Principles, the statutes, and the rules of the Congress. As the Working Group had done a good job, few or no changes were made. There were some amendments made to the Declaration to make it more Christian Democratic. The number of vice presidents was also a point of discussion. The original three were increased to nine to make the Board more representative, taking into account the variety of national member organisations. Once these issues were settled, everything was ready for the dissolution of both EYCD and DEMYC and the foundation of YEPP.

The Founding Congress was organised in Brussels from the 31st of January until the 2nd of February 1997. It was hosted by *CVP-Jongeren* and *Jeunes PSC* and organised by Fredrik Reinfeldt, Winfried Weck, Matthias Peterlik and Belén Ureña from DEMYC, and by Sandro Brodbeck, Brian Murphy, Valentin Hajdinjal and Marc Bertrand from EYCD. It took place on the premises of the Facultés Universitaires Saint-

Louis, in the city centre of Brussels, close to Brussels North station, and welcomed about 300 participants representing 42 organisations from 33 countries. On the afternoon of Friday, 31 January, there was a meeting of the heads of delegation which was followed by the opening session of the Congress. The Congress was inaugurated by EPP President Wilfried Martens. In his speech, he appealed to the new organisation to become a privileged speaker within the EPP. On Saturday morning, the plenary session continued, and the first Board was elected, composed of 13 members (one president, one first vice-president, one secretary general, one deputy secretary general and 9 vice-presidents), as well as two financial auditors. In the afternoon, three working commissions were established: one on the future of Europe, one on stability and security in Europe, and one on the work plan for the incoming Board. The first two produced statements later distributed within YEPP. No less than eight resolutions – on the Council of Europe, employment in Europe, famine in the world, drug trafficking, internet and child abuse, transport and merchandise across the Alps, East Timor and terrorism – were accepted.

The long journey to bring young centre-right Europeans together had reached its destination. The work could now begin.

## 1997-1999: Uniting young Christian Democrats and Conservatives

Upon his election as the first President of YEPP in 1997, Frederik Reinfeldt faced multiple fundamental challenges to YEPP's viability as a single organisation representing such a broad scope of member parties. Central to this was building trust and bridging the ideological and geographical gap between the conservative and Christian Democratic political traditions. Perhaps unsurprisingly, much of Reinfeldt's initiatives undertaken during his mandate were done with this goal in mind.

Indeed, Reinfeldt's election was seen by many as a surprise in itself, as he was the outgoing chair of DEMYC. Reinfeldt viewed his election as a signal of DEMYC's broader commitment to making YEPP succeed. However, the continued existence of DEMYC posed a significant challenge to YEPP in its early days. Unlike EYCD, which had ceased to exist upon the formation of YEPP, DEMYC persisted. So much so that in 1997 in advance of YEPP's formation, DEMYC opened its doors to new member parties from Central and Eastern Europe, adopting much looser membership criteria than YEPP would develop. This created a situation where many organisations were active members of both. However, upon the election of a new DEMYC board in 1997, most YEPP members curtailed their DEMYC engagement to focus on YEPP. Over time DEMYC responded to the growing presence of YEPP by shifting its focus towards becoming an education and training network primarily focused on Central and Eastern Europe.

Balancing geographical and ideological representation in YEPP leadership positions was a clear priority of Reinfeldt's board. It is fair to say they have often outperformed EPP in this regard over the years. From the outset, Central and Eastern Europe were well represented on

the first board. Organisations which had traditionally been strong in DEMYC also made early sacrifices to demonstrate their commitment to YEPP, such as the decision by *JYP* to relinquish the Secretariat, which had been based in Vienna under DEMYC. In advance of the Foundation Congress, a deal was reached to ensure the YEPP Presidency would alternate between YEPP's different factions: the Christian Democrats, Conservatives and People's Parties.

As part of the Board's efforts to build trust, a work plan was negotiated, and adopted to chart YEPP's priorities for the coming years. This would start a tradition for subsequent newly-elected boards. The work plan for YEPP's first board from 1997-8 focused on three areas.

- Firstly 'Political goals': YEPP wanted to develop a positive working relationship with EPP with a focus on being able to influence the political activities of EPP and develop a close relationship with young EPP Group representatives in the European Parliament.
- Secondly, 'Political Tools' which outlined YEPP's attempts to position itself relative to other youth organisations and build its visibility and presence among its stakeholders.
- Finally, the third area focused on YEPP's "Internal atmosphere" and its efforts to develop a positive working relationship between YEPP HQ and its member organisations.

From a practical perspective, the Board worked towards securing many aspects of the organisation's identity and status. It was at the second board meeting in Paris in 1997 that a decision was taken to adopt YEPP's first logo. The board's mandate coincided with the rise of e-mail and minutes of the first board call for 'the development of the e-mail, to have a better communication inside the Board and with national organisations'.

## 1999-2001: Adapting to New Technologies & Political Realities

It was at YEPP's second Congress, held in Lisbon, Portugal from 4-7 March 1999 under the title 'A Bridge to the World' that Michael Hahn was elected President.

The election of YEPP's second board occurred in the early days of Europe's technological revolution, overlapping with European citizens' widespread adoption of the internet. It was the era of the Washington Consensus, of widespread support for globalisation and trade liberalisation, where support for free-market economics reigned supreme.

It was in this context that YEPP published its paper 'The New Rules for the Economy: Are they New Rules for Democracy?'. The paper sought to answer what the impact of this creative destruction would be for politics and more broadly how it would change the nature and role of governments. The paper began by assessing that at the time, 51 of the world's largest economic entities were companies and not governments. It quotes the Swedish Prime Minister Carl Bildt's frank assessment that '*No governmental institution passed proposals for the micro chip. No committee found out the Internet. No party congress adopted the World Wide Web.*' In tandem with the rise of technology, the paper argued that the role and responsibilities of governments should get smaller with individuals, enterprises and organisations getting more responsibilities. It placed a strong emphasis on personal autonomy and responsibility, claiming that technology should give '*people the information they need to govern themselves*'.

On the political level, the paper argued that a renewal of democracy could be found locally through new technologies. The paper correctly identified a growing disconnect between individuals and political

parties, claiming that young people in particular identified with a specific issue or cause. New technologies offered traditional parties a means of bridging this gap through mass communication, making it easier to carry through political campaigns, citing recent examples of how American campaigns had successfully integrated the internet and advising European politicians to follow suit. Most relevant and prophetic were the questions posed towards the end of the paper: 'How is the international political arena affected when private companies become richer and more powerful than many states? Does the Information Society increase equality, especially between sexes, regions and generations? Or does it widen existing gaps? What demands should be put on the educational systems, seen in the light of the ever faster developing Information Society?'.

The issue of immigration also featured strongly on the political agenda of Hahn's board. In June 2000, YEPP hosted a seminar in Nice on Immigration and Asylum, which led to the publication of two working papers. The first of these, "Framing a Common European Approach to Immigration and Asylum", set out the contemporary political context on the issue. The paper recognised Europe as the destination for people fleeing persecution or seeking a better life and called for a Common European Policy on Immigration (as stated in EPP's Action Programme). It questioned whether Europe should move to majority voting on the issue in 2004 as part of the implementation of the Nice Treaty, and whether there should be a single EU-wide procedure for claiming asylum.

YEPP's Second Paper on the issue, "*Examining the Social and Economic Implications of Immigration*", was perhaps more politically intriguing. When viewed with a modern lens, the paper is objectively positive about the subject, categorically stating that YEPP rejects the view of immigrants as welfare scroungers, job snatchers, and involved in the criminal underworld. It argues the importance of immigration to a Europe with an ageing society while also acknowledging the fear that did exist that future EU expansion could lead to significant levels of immigration.



The language in YEPP policy documents towards immigration has noticeably hardened since then, particularly in light of the 2015 Migration Crisis. A 2017 resolution entitled “*Reducing the migration flow along the Mediterranean Route*”, adopted at a YEPP Council meeting in Zurich, emphasises that “*the flow of migrants arriving to the EU has reached an unprecedented scale, challenging our capacity to cope at European, national and local levels*” before calling on the “*EU to be stronger in important areas like foreign, security and defense policies and in securing the external borders together*”<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> *Reducing the migration flow along the Mediterranean Route*, Resolution adopted at YEPP Council meeting in Zurich, 23 September 2017

## 2001-2003: Expanding YEPP and Reforming the EU's institutions

The composition of YEPP's third board was significant, as it was the first one whose members had not previously been active inside DEMYC or EYCD. As well as this, it was the first time there would be an election for the position of President, with outgoing Secretary General Rutger-Jan Hebben (CDJA, the Netherlands) and Daniel Bautista (NNGG, Spain) competing for the post. Hebben was elected with 72 votes compared with 60 in favour of Bautista.

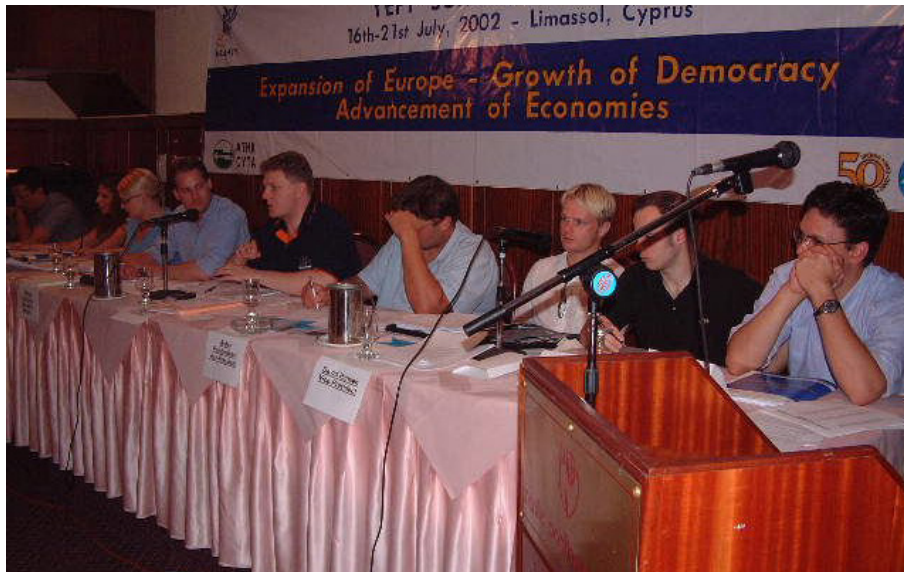
While previous YEPP Presidents had grappled with the logistical challenges of ensuring a newly formed organisation could succeed, Hebben's mandate focused on taking YEPP to the next stage of its development.

In his address to the 2002 EPP Congress in Estoril, Portugal, Hebben outlined how this vision would be based on two pillars: broadening YEPP and deepening YEPP.

Broadening YEPP meant actively expanding YEPP's membership through a careful process involving strict criteria that placed a strong emphasis on a potential partner's long-term viability. As he claimed, “*it does not make sense to simply go for the biggest non-socialist partner in order to be allied with the power in a certain country*”. Deepening YEPP meant increasing the emphasis YEPP placed on political debate and discussion. He cited three topics in his speech:

- EU enlargement
- Stability in the Balkans
- The Future of Europe<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Hebben R.-J., *YEPP President Address*, speech at EPP Congress Plenary Session, 18 October 2002



It was during the mandate of Hebben that YEPP marked the 5th Anniversary of its foundation. The date provided YEPP with an opportunity to reflect on the organisation's achievements. From 7-10 March 2002, a special Anniversary Conference was held in Salamanca, Spain under the title "YEPP: A European Star". The Congress was attended by Spanish political leaders, including Spanish Prime Minister José María Aznar, who participated in a debate about the challenges of globalisation before joining attendees for brunch. In his opening address to the Congress, President Hebben celebrated the recent launch of the Euro as a "*great symbol of European integration*" before calling on EPP leaders to support institutional EU reforms - such as Common Agricultural Policy and Structural Funds - as a necessary precursor to further EU enlargement<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Hebben R.-J., *YEPP President's Intervention*. Speech at YEPP 5 Anniversary Event and III Chairman's Conference, 7 March 2002

At the Anniversary Congress, YEPP launched a white paper entitled "A European Political Youth Organisation?". The document explored what the primary function of YEPP should be as well as political youth wings more generally. It argued that the mission of a political youth wing should be based on three pillars:

- **The campaigner** – awakens young people's interest in politics and the democratic process
- **The practical school** – educates young people on how to influence the political system
- **The ideological school** – enables young people to meet with like-minded people who share certain core beliefs

The document articulated YEPP's plan on how to enhance the organisation's political profile, position itself as the primary vehicle for young Europeans seeking to influence European politics as well as other strategic priorities like developing an effective communication plan.

In the aftermath of the summits of Maastricht (1991), Amsterdam (1997) and Nice (2000) where new treaties had been agreed upon and given the upcoming 'Big Bang Enlargement' – when the EU would accept ten new member states in 2004 – this was an era of significant institutional change for the EU.

In this context, YEPP published its document "*The Future Is Ours: 10 Theses for the Future of Europe*" at a YEPP Council meeting in Geneva on 26 January 2002 to outline YEPP's vision for how the EU institutions would function post-enlargement. The document was published to coincide with the Laeken European Council meeting that was to decide on the creation of a European Convention. As part of this engagement, YEPP partnered with DEMYC and EDS to bring 210 young people together at the European Parliament to develop common positions on EU institutional reform. Their work was then presented to the Convention and board members from this time speak proudly of how some of their recommendations were included in the Lisbon Treaty.

Describing the upcoming enlargement as “*the political reunification of Europe after decades of division*”, the paper reiterated YEPP’s commitment to an EU built on the principles of democracy, the rule of law, good governance, transparency and accountability. The paper was critical of the EU’s approach, claiming that “*institutional reform processes have become the status quo of the EU*” and that “*a lack of transparency of the procedures and package deals with incoherent results have lead to mistrust and criticism from Europeans and have undermined public support for European integration*”.

YEPP called on the EU to clarify the distribution of competencies between the EU and member states and the relationships between the institutions of the Union. When viewed with hindsight, many of the paper’s institutional recommendations did eventually become a reality, such as the call for the European Commission to transform into the executive arm of the EU and for European Commissioners to be appointed based on there being one from each member state. However, some of the propositions, such as the call to transform the European Council into the EU’s second chamber, rename it the Chamber of States and have it composed of two representatives from each member state, did not come to pass<sup>5</sup>. Nor did YEPP’s call to grant the European Parliament the authority to dismiss individual European Commissioners.

The mandate of Rutger-Jan Hebben concluded on 29 March 2003 with an address to the 4th YEPP Congress held at the Hague in the Netherlands. In his farewell speech, Hebben reflected on the progress YEPP had made since its foundational Congress before revisiting his priority areas of Broadening YEPP and Deepening YEPP. On Broadening YEPP, he cited the accession of eight new YEPP member organisations - Bulgaria YUDF, Czechia JKKD, Denmark KU, Georgia AED, Hungary Fidelitas, Italy FIG, Moldova NG PPCD and Slovenia NG SLS –, two new Observer members - JUMP from France and Malady Front from

5 THE FUTURE IS OURS: 10 theses on the Future of Europe, YEPP Council, Geneva, 2002

Belarus – and the four new organisations who had begun the process of applying for YEPP membership.

On Deepening YEPP, he cited the almost 50 resolutions and policy papers that had been adopted under his tenure. Hebben finished his address by praising the increased respect that YEPP representatives commanded within the structures of EPP before signalling the importance of YEPP members to begin working in advance of the 2004 European elections.



## 2003-2005: Preparing for the ‘Big Bang’ Enlargement

The issues of institutional reform and enlargement would dominate YEPP’s agenda for the mandate of Daniel Bautista. This was already made clear when delegates met for YEPP’s 4th Congress from 10-12 April 2003 in the Hague, Netherlands. Co-hosted by CDJA, the Congress was titled “*Challenges for a new Europe*” and saw participants develop positions on the future direction of Europe after the 2004 enlargement.

From its earliest days, YEPP had always taken a proactive role in supporting EU enlargement. From a stakeholder perspective, this made sense as, even at the time of its foundation, YEPP was not exclusively oriented towards Western Europe and included members from Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine. YEPP believed that enlargement is a process and not a destination in itself: signing the *aquis communautaire* is one thing, but implementing and executing it is the real challenge. The primary responsibility lies with the new member states. Still, the EU as a whole also has a responsibility to integrate economies, labour markets, agriculture and so on by investing time and resources.

In a resolution adopted at a YEPP Council in Vienna in 1998, YEPP laid a context for future actions on the issue supporting:

- A Europe united by common values, a common history and common goals, a Europe whose union is based on the rich diversity of the different national and regional traditions of its peoples and ethnic groups and shaped by the principles of democracy and subsidiarity

- Are convinced that the process of European integration, as initiated, above all, by leading Christian Democratic politicians after the horrors of 2 World wars, must be continued in order to provide a reliable basis for lasting peace in Europe and harmonious relations between its peoples and to strengthen the role of Europe in the world
- The opportunity, unique in history, to unite the whole of Europe. The enlargement of the European Union to include the countries of Central, Eastern and Southern Europe constitutes an essential priority for YEPP<sup>6</sup>.

In 2003, with EU enlargement leading the EU’s political agenda, YEPP focused its activities towards generating support for EU accession in candidate countries. In January, the Board met in Malta as a statement of support for the country’s EU membership. At the time, the country’s Labour Party government sought to delay holding a referendum on the issue in opposition to the expressed wishes of the Maltese electorate.



<sup>6</sup> Enlargement of the European Union, Resolution adopted at YEPP Council meeting in Vienna, 5 December 1998



A resolution published after the meeting called on the government not to boycott or refuse to accept the result of the Referendum. It urged citizens to vote “*in favor of Europe, of peace and stability*”<sup>7</sup>.

In June, 100 YEPP delegates met for a seminar in Prague, a week before Czech citizens went to the polls to vote on EU membership. The seminar in Prague also coincided with the conclusion of the Convention on the Future of Europe’s work on drafting a constitution for Europe. Upon the seminar’s conclusion, YEPP published a resolution which analysed the Convention’s proposal. Altogether, it was not a particularly positive assessment of the Convention’s work. It expressed disappointment that YEPP’s aforementioned proposal to grant the European Parliament the authority to impeach Commissioners had not been taken on board and criticised the proposal to create a European Council President, claiming such a move would undermine the work of the European Commission.

Then, in December 2003, YEPP arranged a seminar in Vienna to examine the economic impacts of enlargement, entitled “*Enlarged Economies in an Enlarged Society*”. This seminar featured addresses from various experts who drew heavily on Austria’s experience as a neighbouring country to newer member states while exploring the possibilities and risks of EU enlargement to the employment market. Upon reflection, it can now be argued that some of YEPP’s messaging at the time were to a degree naïve about the potential negative impacts of enlargement. For example, in a position paper published at the time, YEPP rejected the idea that EU enlargement could lead to mass migration from newer member states and trigger an economic brain drain across Eastern Europe, something that has now been shown to have taken place.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Malta’s accession to the European Union, Emergency resolution adopted at YEPP Council in Malta, 18 January 2003

<sup>8</sup> Bautista K., Creighton L., *YEPP 2004 Yearbook*, January 2005

The 2004 elections were, therefore, more significant as they were the first European elections where citizens of 25 EU countries would be called to vote. In preparation, YEPP formed two ad-hoc working groups to refine its campaign message and strategy. Under the title “*We Stand for Europe!*” YEPP representatives campaigned across Europe, offering materials and support to young EPP-affiliated candidates. In the end, EPP retained their place as the largest group in the European Parliament with 268 seats, of which 9 were YEPP members.



## 2005-2007: Internal Reforms and International Reach

"A Political Ambition for Europe" was the title of YEPP's fifth Congress, which was held from 17-20 March 2005 and saw David Hansen elected President alongside a new officer board. Hansen was elected after narrowly beating Lucinda Creighton from Young Fine Gael by a margin of 7 votes<sup>9</sup>. The Congress was hosted by *Jeunes Populaires*, the newly formed youth wing of *Union pour un Mouvement Populaire [UMP]* and attended by 350 delegates. Indeed, it was during the Congress Plenary session that *Jeunes Populaires* were officially accepted as YEPP members alongside YLPP (Latvia), Young Rukh (Ukraine) and SDKU (Slovakia). Then UMP party leader and later French President Nicolas Sarkozy led a debate on the Lisbon Process during the Congress's second day<sup>10</sup>. The Lisbon Process was the EU's development plan for the decade up to 2010 which aimed to make the EU a dynamic economy with an emphasis on high-skilled employment and strong social cohesion and environmental policies.

As YEPP approached its 10th anniversary, a decision was made by the newly-elected board to thoroughly evaluate the organisation's structures and financial systems through the creation of 3 new Permanent Working Groups (PWG): PWG on Financial Reform, PWG on Statutory Reform, PWG on Political Reform.

The working groups would seek to modernise YEPP's political programme while also seeking to secure its long-term financial future

<sup>9</sup> Van Hecke S. and Wolfs W., *UNITED BY ONE CONVICTION The history of the Youth of the European People's Party*, Antwerp, 21 January 2012

<sup>10</sup> Hansen D., Mommerency A.-P., *YEPP 2005 Yearbook*, February 2006

while reviewing YEPP's statutes to address challenges that had emerged in line with the organisation's growth. Traditionally, YEPP's income had been based on membership fees, a grant from EPP and occasional funding rounds from the European Commission or Council of Europe. As the organisation expanded and, with it, the scope and number of its activities, this was becoming increasingly insufficient, leading to the organisation accruing significant debt. A decision was taken that YEPP representatives from Central and Eastern Europe (with the exception of Belarus) would not receive any travel reimbursements, and no fees were given to national organisations hosting a YEPP event. Instead they were allowed to ask for participation fees. These measures helped to reduce the expenses, but they were insufficient to pay back the debts from the past.

The package prepared by the working group included proposals for increasing the income (more external funding, the introduction of a "*Friends of YEPP Network*", a Participation Fund and a rise in the membership fees) and for reducing the expenditures (a revision of the reimbursement of travel costs and a cost-limit for board members)<sup>11</sup>.



<sup>11</sup> Mommerency A.-P., *YEPP 2006 Yearbook*, February 2007

Concurrent to this, a report by MEP Jo Leinen into the finances of European political parties gave special recognition to the role of European youth organisations, and a working group was formed to examine the issue in greater detail. In his opening remarks in YEPP's 2006 Yearbook, President Hansen offered a frank assessment of the situation, claiming "*our financial difficulties are first and foremost due to the complete lack of sufficient sources at the European Institutions to fund our activities*" and acknowledged that YEPP had "*found allies in the other European party-political youth organisations; with the young socialists, the young liberals and the young greens*".

During Hansen's mandate, the Board renewed its efforts to deepen links in Europe's neighbourhood by hosting seminars in both the Balkans and South Caucasus regions as well as having YEPP delegations participate in conferences in Russia and China.



From 23-26 June 2005, in partnership with the *Konrad Adenauer Stiftung Foundation* and the Council of Europe, YEPP representatives gathered in Belgrade for the 4th YEPP Balkans Conference under the title "*Facing the Future Together*". The weekend's discussions focused on answering questions about how countries in the Balkan region could be better integrated into Euro-Atlantic structures. Two

organisations from Serbia, Youth of Democratic Party of Serbia (YDPS) and Youth of G17+, presented their work to the seminar's participants. YDPS was presented by Borko Ilic, President of YDPS and Andreja Milivojevic, International Secretary of YDPS. At the seminar, the board ratified a working paper on the European Perspective on the Balkan Region which emphasised the need for increased EU engagement in the region to combat endemic problems such as organised crime and corruption and as a means of enhancing regional co-operation<sup>12</sup>.

In late September 2005, YEPP delegates then met in Tbilisi for a seminar under the title "*New Challenges – New Chances for South Caucasus Countries*" in partnership with the *Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation*. Participants debated the political situation in Georgia with contributions from local MPs and the status of media freedom in Georgia. At a Council meeting held on the seminar's final day, the board ratified YEPP's position paper on the future of EU-Georgia integration<sup>13</sup>.

At this time, policymakers were still optimistic about the prospects for a more positive relationship between the West and post-Soviet Russia and greater integration of the Russian Federation into global political institutions. Russia was preparing to host the 32 G8 Summit in St. Petersburg in 2006, where its membership of the G8 collective would be confirmed, and its full membership of the WTO discussed. In keeping with this spirit, a YEPP delegation consisting of President Hansen, Executive Officer Ann-Pascale Mommerency and VPs David Cermak and Galina Fomenchenko travelled to Moscow to participate in a conference entitled "*European Perspectives and Political Activity of the of the Young Generation in the Post-Soviet Space*". The conference was co-hosted by the Youth of the Union of Right Forces together with the Representation of International Republican Institute (IRI) in Moscow.

<sup>12</sup> *European Perspectives for the Balkan Region*, Working paper adopted at the YEPP Balkan Conference, Belgrade, 23 June 2006

<sup>13</sup> Pruidze I., *Report on Tbilisi Seminar*, 2 October 2005



While more than half of the Congress participants were YEPP activists from Eastern Europe, the event gave the delegation a rare opportunity to engage in person with Russian youth organisations and understand the country's political landscape. However, this positive approach would not endure. A 2008 resolution adopted at a YEPP Council meeting strongly criticised Russia's moves to close the British Council Offices in Moscow and characterised the year's Russian parliamentary elections as "failing to have met democratic standards"<sup>14</sup>.



<sup>14</sup> *Recent Developments in Russia*, Emergency Resolution adopted at YEPP Council Meeting on 19 January 2008

## 2007-2009: 10th Anniversary & Preparing for Lisbon

The mandate of Yannis Smrylis began upon his election at YEPP's VI and 10 Anniversary Congress in Stockholm under the title "*Agenda Setting in Europe*" from 10-13 May 2007. The Congress was held in partnership with YEPP's Swedish member parties, the Young Christian Democrats (KDU) and the Young Moderates (MUF).

Selecting Stockholm as the location for this Congress was a somewhat poignant decision as, ten years after being elected as YEPP's first President, Fredrik Reinfeldt had now been elected as Prime Minister of Sweden. Over the course of those ten years, YEPP had developed into the largest youth political organisation in Europe.

Following the election of a new YEPP Board, the Congress ratified YEPP's new political programme, "*Tomorrow's Answers Start Today*". It reaffirmed YEPP's values and offered a detailed breakdown of YEPP positions on policy areas such as the future of the European economy, employment, energy security, home affairs, neighbourhood policy and the environment. In his first address upon his election, President Smrylis outlined his policy priorities for his mandate, which included the new European Constitutional Pact, Migration Policy, the neighbourhood policy and integrated Defence Policy.

On the European Policy agenda, the debate around the Lisbon Treaty dominated Smrylis' mandate. For years, YEPP had fed into the debate about the details of the Treaty, calling for increased competencies for the EU's institutions, a clearer breakdown of the division between EU and national competencies and greater transparency in how the institutions operate as a means to bridge the gap between citizens and the EU.



As part of YEPP's preparations for the 2009 European elections, the Presidents of all YEPP's member parties signed A Charter of Principles at a meeting of the Conference of YEPP Chairpersons in Porto. The charter placed a great emphasis on the Lisbon Treaty, saying it should be regarded as an opportunity to "*revive the European spirit by strengthening accountability of the EU institutions*" and was an "*important step towards building a more democratic EU*"<sup>15</sup>.

From 6-8 March 2008, YEPP gathered for a seminar in Cork, Ireland, to demonstrate the organisation's support for the country's upcoming referendum. The seminar was a partnership between YEPP, Young Fine Gael and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. Addressing the conference, former YEPP Vice President and Fine Gael Deputy Lucinda Creighton stressed Fine Gael's duty, as member of the European People's Party, to lead the campaign. She outlined details of a dynamic campaign that was closely planned in cooperation with EPP that would seek to engage directly with young people on the issue by leafletting concerts and sporting events as well as a busy schedule of public meetings to be held across the country.

In his address to the seminar, former President of the Young European Christian Democrats, Brian Murphy, spoke of how Fine Gael had supported every European treaty referendum that has come before the Irish people since accession in 1973. After the defeat of the Nice Treaty, Fine Gael campaigned vigorously in the second referendum on Nice. Fine Gael party leader Enda Kenny outlined how the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty was an opportunity to tackle key challenges – demographic change, the need to expand the knowledge-based economy and climate change<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> CHARTER OF PRINCIPLES FOR THE 2009 EUROPEAN ELECTIONS, Adopted at the VI YEPP Conference of Chairpersons, 25 May 2008

<sup>16</sup> Mommerency A.-P. and Lawless J., *YEPP 2008 Yearbook*, February 2009

## 2009-11: Greening YEPP's Agenda

The VII YEPP Congress was held in Rome from 2-5 April 2009 in partnership with YEPP's three Italian member organisations - F.I.G., UDC, and U.D.euR – under the title "*Europe at a Crossroads*". At the Congress, Laurent Schouteten was elected the seventh YEPP President after defeating the incumbent Yannis Smyrlis in a moment of high political drama. At the time UMS of VMRO-DPMNE (FYROM) were in the process of applying to become an observer YEPP member and having met the criteria, their application was subject to the approval of Congress delegates. Smyrlis, a Greek, opposed their application. The vote on their membership was defeated after delegates were asked to vote by raising their hands leading many of those present – led by the *Junge Union* delegation - to protest and call instead for a secret ballot. The negative approach to the issue created a sense of resentment towards Smyrlis. As one delegate who was present at the Congress put it, "*the moment the Macedonians did not get in, Smyrlis lost his election*".

The Congress marked a moment of transition for YEPP with the departure of YEPP's long-serving Executive Officer Ann-Pascale Mommerency, who received a standing ovation from delegates after announcing that she would be leaving her role after seven years. The first day of the Congress included a discussion from young elected politicians from across Europe. It included contributions from Giorgia Meloni, then Italian Minister for the Youth, Monica Maria Iacob-Ridzi, Romanian Minister for the Youth, Daniel Bautista, MEP and former YEPP President Annagrazia Calabria, the youngest MP in the Italian parliament.

At the EPP Congress in Warsaw, the newly-elected YEPP Board held their first meeting. At the meeting, Schouteten presented a strategic plan for YEPP for his mandate and responsibilities for working groups,



portfolios and other tasks were allocated to the Board members. In his address to the Congress plenary session, Schouteten highlighted the increasing challenges of generational conflict and ageing populations across Europe.

Despite the work of previous Boards to rectify the situation through the new financial plan, YEPP was now in a dire financial situation and facing the real prospect of bankruptcy. It lacked enough money to pay the Executive Officer, and Board members were often not getting reimbursements for up to 9 months. It was a loan from the Danish Christian Democrats negotiated by Deputy Secretary General Brenda Furniere that allowed YEPP to stay afloat. To address these issues more long-term, a closer relationship with the EPP Headquarters' Financial Officer was nurtured whereby EPP would provide YEPP with oversight on financial and legal matters.

Environment policy became a political priority of Schouteten's mandate. Upon the Board's election, a dedicated Working Group on Sustainable Development was formed, overseen by VP Csaba Dömötör with support from VP Juha-Pekka Nurvala. The Working Group met at each YEPP Seminar and produced a white paper ratified at the YEPP Seminar in the Hague before being ratified by the EPP Congress in Bonn by an overwhelming majority. This was a significant achievement for YEPP as it meant YEPP's environmental policy had now become EPP's. The paper outlined a centre-right vision for climate policy that aimed to strike a balance between the gravity of the challenge of climate change and the need to support businesses as they reduce their carbon output while highlighting the economic opportunities in emerging green technologies.

The first year of Schouteten's mandate was one of high activity on the European political calendar, with the 2009 European elections and the ratification and implementation of the Lisbon treaty dominating proceedings. For the European elections, YEPP acknowledged a lack of enthusiasm that had permeated Europe, reflected in record low turnout in 2004. To address this and boost youth engagement,



in YEPP's 2009 campaign manifesto, they called on EPP member parties to field at least one young candidate who would be in with a realistic chance of being elected while also calling for immediate action on climate change.

In October 2009, citizens in Ireland voted for the second time on ratifying the Lisbon Treaty. A resolution adopted by YEPP at their September Council meeting in the Hague urged support for the referendum, calling on EU governments to support pro-Lisbon parties in Ireland and to '*actively contest the false and misleading information being circulated by opponents of the Treaty*'<sup>17</sup>. Irish voters passed the referendum, which paved the way for the Lisbon Treaty's ratification and implementation in December 2009.



<sup>17</sup> *Second Irish Referendum on the Lisbon Treaty*, Resolution adopted at YEPP Council Meeting at the Hague, 5 September 2009

## 2011-2013: A Europe in Economic Crisis

Csaba Dömötör became YEPP's first president from Central and Eastern Europe when he was elected at the VII Congress held in Berlin from 12-15 May 2011 under the title *How to Finance the European Union in the 21st Century*.

At the time, Europe was in the midst of economic despair. The Financial Crisis and ensuing EU/IMF bailouts and austerity budgets had ruptured the EU's economic and fiscal systems, sparking a multitude of emergency measures to prevent the total collapse of the EU's monetary systems. Europe's young people were experiencing the crisis particularly keenly, facing the prospect of mass emigration, lifelong debt as repayment for emergency measures and youth unemployment rates spiking at over 30% in countries like Greece and Italy. In the immediate response to the crisis, the citizens of many EU countries trusted the economic rationale of EPP governments, with Fine Gael elected in Ireland, Partido Popular in Spain and PSD in Portugal on a commitment to deliver stability.

It is perhaps unsurprising then that EU economic and fiscal policy dominated Dömötör's policy agenda, with the YEPP board adopting six policy papers related to economic policy in 2011 alone. In his address to the 2011 EPP Congress, President Dömötör focused exclusively on highlighting the impact of the financial crisis on Europe's youth, warning of the temptation of political extremism for a generation beset by mass unemployment. He committed YEPP to fight against political extremism in all its forms and renewing its struggle against political apathy.

In a sign of the times and the emerging prominence of social media, he emphasised the need for this fight to be carried out by EPP





both online and offline<sup>18</sup>. When filling the same slot at YEPP's 2012 Congress in Bucharest, Dörmötör's message was broader. While he

<sup>18</sup> Dörmötör C., *Europe cannot afford to have a passive future generation*, Speech delivered to EPP Congress Plenary Session, 13 December 2011

still emphasised the importance of job creation and debt reduction, he expanded his speech to reference Europe's low birthrates as a long-term economic challenge<sup>19</sup>. It was at EPP's Bucharest Congress, YEPP succeeded in having a YEPP candidate elected to the EPP Presidency for the first time. Following a vigorous campaign, YEPP's Lucinda Creighton saw off three European Commissioners to top the poll<sup>20</sup>.

Among YEPP's economic papers was a white paper entitled "*Economic Governance for a stronger European Union*", ratified at YEPP's Berlin Congress. The paper began by outlining the many causes of Europe's dire economic situation, citing how unchecked budgets, macroeconomic imbalances and economic divergence between Eurozone members had all fed into the crisis and risked provoking contagion due to the highly integrated nature of European markets. The paper supported recent measures such as the Stability and Growth Pact for providing stability and established criteria for fiscal discipline in the Eurozone. It called on the EU institutions to increase the monitoring and surveillance of the fiscal strategies of member states in order to guarantee stability and on member states themselves to commit to fiscal discipline. The paper also outlined YEPP's support for a European IMF, called a European Credit Agency. It then directly called on EPP and its member parties to focus on the principle of intergenerational justice, cognisant of the impact of the crisis on the futures of millions of young Europeans<sup>21</sup>.

YEPP doubled down on its efforts to address the impacts of the crisis on young people and published another white paper entitled "*Fighting Youth Unemployment*" at the 2012 YEPP Chairman's Congress in Lisbon. This paper offered an in-depth look at the causes and impacts of widespread unemployment on Europe's young people. This

<sup>19</sup> Dörmötör C., *Our Flag for the Future*, Speech delivered to EPP Congress Plenary Session, 05 November 2012

<sup>20</sup> YEPP candidate Lucinda Creighton elected first in EPP Board, 02 November 2010

<sup>21</sup> *Economic Governance for a stronger European Union*, White Paper adopted at YEPP Congress in Berlin, 14 May 2011

included the secondary impacts such as family life. It then listed ten measures to be implemented as a means of rectifying the situation. Reforming Europe's education system to include a greater emphasis on practical experience and digital skills featured prominently throughout the document and calls for increased support for young European entrepreneurs through tax cuts and eliminating unnecessary red tape.

It was clear that through YEPP's calls for greater monitoring of national budgets and constraints on borrowing that the onset of the Financial Crisis had provided the greatest challenge to the deregulatory and neoliberal economic orthodoxy which had guided YEPP's economic policy since its foundation.



## 2013-2017: Jobs Jobs Jobs and Spitzenkandidat Campaigning

It was at YEPP's IX Congress in Sofia on 14 May 2013 that Kostas Kyranakis was elected as YEPP's 9th President. Speaking after his election, Kyranakis pinpointed the 2014 European elections as a priority for his mandate, pitching it as a battle between the centre-right and populism, when he claimed: *"It is our responsibility to lead the EU election campaign among the youth of Europe and do our best to win the battle against populism"*. Following his subsequent re-election in Porto, Kostas would become the first YEPP leader to succeed in being re-elected.

Preparation for the 2014 European elections began immediately as YEPP sought innovative ways to mobilise young Europeans to vote in elections that were often viewed as secondary and abstained on by an increasingly apathetic young electorate.

In May 2013, as part of YEPP's long-standing affiliation with the European Youth Forum, YEPP supported the launch of the European League of Young Voters, an initiative aimed at driving young turnout by placing youth-related issues on the political agenda<sup>22</sup>. In November 2013, YEPP hosted its inaugural 'Campaign Days' event in Brussels when 70 representatives of YEPP member organisations gathered for a day of digital and media training to prepare for the upcoming elections. At the meeting of the YEPP Council of Presidents in October 2013, YEPP underlined its commitment through a resolution calling on EPP to launch a common European campaign. The resolution urged

<sup>22</sup> YEPP supports the European "League of Young Voters", 30 May 2013





EPP to draft a common manifesto on critical priority areas and on member parties to share stories of EPP successes in areas like job creation as well as more practical requests such as for candidates to display EPP logo on their literature as well as the national member party they were representing<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> COMMON EPP ELECTION CAMPAIGN, Resolution adopted at YEPP Council of Presidents in Bucharest, 5 October 2013

During the hot phase of the campaign, YEPP launched the “Juncker Bus”, an 11-day Europe road trip in support of Jean Claude Juncker’s campaign to become President of the European Commission under the *Spitzenkandidat* process. The campaign saw five teams of young Europeans visit 25 countries and participate in 60 events. During the road trip, the teams spoke with voters and collected messages from the youth of Europe, that would be presented to Juncker when the campaign reached Brussels. At the launch of the “Juncker Bus” in Athens, Kyranakis, who was himself contesting the European elections, spoke of his desire to spread Juncker’s message of experience, solidarity and future.

Under Kyranakis’ leadership, YEPP continued its heavy campaigning on the issue of job creation and youth unemployment. In an innovative approach to campaigning, ahead of the final EU Council meeting on youth unemployment, YEPP encouraged members across the EU to engage with their local representatives directly on the issue by downloading and posting a pre-drafted letter<sup>24</sup>. The campaign was to



<sup>24</sup> Jobs Campaign – Round 2, Job Creation Youth Summit, October 2013



prove successful, with the inclusion of YEPP proposals in the official conclusions of the Council, specifically that “*the European Council recalled the importance of shifting taxation away from labor, including by reducing social contributions, as appropriate, as a means of increasing employability and boosting job creation and competitiveness.*”

In November 2013, following the sudden decision of the Ukrainian government not to proceed with the EU-Ukraine association agreement, protests erupted across the country in what would become known as the Maidan uprising. The movement placed EU-Ukrainian relations at the top of the political agenda. YEPP had a consistent history of solid engagement with Ukrainian partners and a track record of advocating for deeper cooperation with Kyiv. Throughout YEPP’s history, representatives have closely monitored the country’s political situation and democratic status, with resolutions on the issue frequently being tabled at YEPP events. These included a 2004 resolution proposed by *Junge Union* which raised concerns about the country’s recent parliamentary elections<sup>25</sup>, and a 2011 resolution tabled at a council meeting in Marseille that criticised the Yanukovich government’s movements to curtail democratic freedoms in the country and imprisonment of political opponents such as Yulia Tymoshenko<sup>26</sup>. Indeed, following the imprisonment of Tymoshenko, a YEPP mission led by SG Colm Lauder and Treasurer Frank Visser travelled to Kyiv and held a press conference calling for her release and sending a statement of support for the country’s democratic opposition<sup>27</sup>.

YEPP condemned the act following the illegal annexation of Crimea, tabling a resolution calling on Russia to restore Ukrainian territorial

<sup>25</sup> *Strengthening Democracy in Europe!*, Resolution proposed by Junge Union and adopted at YEPP Council Meeting, October 2013

<sup>26</sup> *Current Situation in Ukraine*, Emergency resolution adopted at YEPP Council in Marseille, 10 December 2011

<sup>27</sup> *YEPP Mission to Ukraine publicly supports the democratic opposition*, 20 October 2013



integrity and disarm terrorist groups in Donbas<sup>28</sup>. In response to the rising levels of violence being faced by protestors in the country following the Maidan revolution, YEPP partnered with the US Young Republicans to release a joint statement calling for an urgent convening of the UN Security Council and to use all means at their disposal to cease the violence and freeze the assets of oligarchs in control of the country and prosecute those responsible. YEPP representatives visited the country frequently these days and on the second anniversary of the Maidan Revolution, a YEPP Council was convened in Kyiv as a statement of support for the country's future European integration and to launch a paper detailing specific reforms to progress this journey and secure the country's democratic institutions<sup>29</sup>. In a blog written after this meeting, YEPP President Kryranakis offered a frank assessment of the myriad of challenges facing the country: a threefold increase in the price of gas, the high likelihood of increased Russian aggression and political instability which would likely trigger fresh elections<sup>30</sup>.

28 *Political and Social Situation in Ukraine*, Resolution adopted at YEPP Conference of Presidents in Athens, 6 December 2014

29 <https://youthpep.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Reforming-Ukraine-White-Paper.pdf>

30 Kryranakis K., *Ukraine: The Danger Within*, Blog post, 12 December 2015



## 2017-2018: YEPP in the Digital World

Dubrovnik, Croatia was the location for YEPP's 10th Congress when Andrianous Giannou (TNL) was elected YEPP President. In his acceptance speech, Giannou outlined a forward-looking agenda, identifying the future of labour, the future of work and, indeed, the future of Europe as his priority policy areas.

At the time, Europe was engulfed in a wave of political populism. The election of Donald Trump as US President and the decision by UK voters to vote to leave the European Union, in tandem with surging support for anti-establishment political movements such as the Front National in France and the *Alternative für Deutschland (AFD)* in Germany, had shredded post-World War II European political convention. Across the EU, voters were furious after a decade of stagnant economic growth, rapidly changing societies and uncontrolled technological advances, and EPP parties were suffering electorally as a result. Parties needed to establish a new way to regain the trust of voters and develop an entirely new approach to engaging with young people.

These challenges weighed heavily on the pages of YEPP's Future of Europe paper adopted at YEPP's Congress of Presidents in February 2018. The publication opened by exploring how the rapid pace of the Fourth Industrial Revolution had disrupted an age-old covenant between the citizens, the state and private enterprise. The paper argued that at this moment of societal upheaval, Europe must become a continent that embraces innovation, technological advancement and automation for the betterment of its people with institutions that are more agile and capable of adapting to rapid change. This meant a renewed emphasis on the principle of subsidiarity – a Europe that is “*big on the big things and small on the small things*” – and a common approach to policy areas such as foreign affairs, tackling organised



crime, protecting external borders and defence. From an institutional perspective, YEPP were now arguing in favour of a European Parliament with the power to initiate legislation and directly elected European Commission President as a means to guarantee engagement with citizens. Finally, the paper stressed the need to move away from the long-held practice of nationalising success and Europeanising failure.

The onset of the digital age and the arrival of multinational tech firms into the European Union challenged the functioning of the EU's institutions. The Single Market – long regarded as the greatest achievement of the EU – was lagging behind the pace of modern business and trade. In supporting President Juncker's work on the Digital Single Market, YEPP highlighted the opportunities for the EU in the emerging global data economy. Similarly, digital commerce had complicated the traditional understanding of corporate tax. In 2016, in a landmark case, the European Commission fined Apple €13bn over its tax arrangements with the Irish government, accusing the firm of breaching state-aid rules and improper profit allocation. Ensuring that companies pay fairer tax was outlined as an important aspect of societal cohesion in YEPP's Future of Europe document. This was expanded upon in a resolution entitled "*Fair taxation of the Digital Economy*", adopted at a YEPP Council meeting in Milan in February 2018<sup>31</sup>. In this document, YEPP acknowledged that digitalisation had given international firms a competitive advantage over SMEs – which had long been the bedrock of the European economy and cornerstone of centre-right economic policy – before calling on the European Commission and the EU Member States to act on the principle that profits are taxed where they are gained.

Throughout its history, YEPP had prioritised engagement with farmers, particularly young farmers. Yet, despite this, almost 56% of European farmers were aged over 65, with only 6% aged under 35.

<sup>31</sup> *Fair taxation of the Digital Economy*, Resolution adopted at the YEPP Council Meeting in Milan, 17 February 2018





In light of the upcoming 2020 revision of the Common Agricultural Policy, in 2018, YEPP published its white paper on the future of Agriculture in Europe which outlined a pathway to securing the sector's long-term future as a viable career pathway and a cornerstone of rural communities across the continent while also making the sector more environmentally sustainable.

It was during the mandate of Giannou that EU-UK negotiations over the UK's withdrawal from the European Union began in earnest, with EPP's Michel Barnier serving as Chief Brexit negotiator on behalf of the European Union. A resolution, tabled at the YEPP Conference of Presidents in Vienna in October 2016, sets out YEPP's concerns for the process, which included the need to protect the single market, and ensure citizens' rights are respected<sup>32</sup>. A later resolution by YEPP

<sup>32</sup> *Brexit*, Resolution adopted at YEPP Council of Presidents, Vienna, Austria, 8 October 2016



in November 2017 called for a frictionless border between the EU-UK to be maintained as a prerequisite to talks advancing to the next stage and a necessity to protect the Good Friday Agreement that ended the conflict in Northern Ireland.

Yet, overall, what is most interesting is that despite the long shadow that Brexit negotiations cast over the EU institutions and work agenda, how little it appears in YEPP's documents at the time. Perhaps, as is the case with EPP, this could be attributed to the fact that within YEPP circles, Brexit was not a particularly contentious issue as the organisation did not have any members from the United Kingdom.



## 2018-Present: Overcoming the pandemic and YEPP as an agenda-setter

Lídia Pereira became YEPP's 12<sup>th</sup> President and first female President when she was elected at the Congress in Athens in November 2018. Pereira had had been involved with *Juventude Social Democrata [JSD]* and politics during her student years in Coimbra. YEPP's Athens Congress took place the week before EPP's Electoral Congress in Helsinki, where Manfred Weber MEP saw off competition from former Finnish Prime Minister Alex Stubb to become EPP's *Spitzenkandidat* for the 2019 European elections. Upon Pereira's election as YEPP President, she set a successful partnership with EPP for the campaign as her immediate priority as well as policy work on topics such as the digital revolution, the future of farming, and the future of work.

Further success soon followed for Pereira as she was named as a lead candidate herself for her party PSD in Portugal and succeeded in being elected MEP in May 2019.

A strategic priority of Pereira's mandate was boosting the organisation's profile on social media and harnessing the power of YEPP's network across Europe to position YEPP as an agenda-setter in Brussels. An example of this could be seen with YEPP's #WithBelarus digital campaign. When the Lukashenko regime had claimed victory in a rigged election and began further curtailing the country's already squeezed civic space by jailing those who protested against this, YEPP mobilised its network of young parliamentarians across Europe in a show of support for the protestors efforts and call for action to European leaders. Online content from the campaign was shared widely by leaders across the EU institutions, and the YEPP's campaign hashtag became rooted in online conversations about the country's future.

It was during the mandate of Pereira that the COVID-19 pandemic rocked the foundations of global society. Both YEPP and Pereira herself were proactive in their response to the crisis. Like most organisations, YEPP activities moved online during the crisis. At a virtual YEPP Council meeting held via Zoom, a resolution was ratified that called for a harmonised EU approach to dealing with COVID-19<sup>33</sup>. As health had always been a national competency, there were many immediate obstacles to be overcome when devising a truly European response to the pandemic, such as increased data-sharing between Member states on future health threats, closer co-ordination on travel arrangements. After a year of COVID-mandated restrictions, online spaces had become hotbeds of misinformation about the pandemic. To counter this, when the COVID mRNA vaccines were launched, YEPP launched its #VaccinesWork campaign. The campaign began with a declaration that was signed by Pereira, EPP President Donald Tusk and EPP Group Chair Manfred Weber as well as young national parliamentarians from across the continent. The declaration addressed myths about vaccinations and spoke about their importance as part of Europe's strategy towards loosening societal restrictions and emerging from the pandemic. In a strange coincidence, it was at the EPP Congress in Zagreb just weeks before the onset of the pandemic, that YEPP had put forward a resolution in support of vaccinations in response to the decreasing uptake of vaccines across the continent, thereby making countering vaccine hesitancy official EPP policy<sup>34</sup>.

Under Pereira's leadership, YEPP has worked to renew the transatlantic relationship among the next generation of political leaders which had been challenged fundamentally by the "America First" agenda of the Trump Administration. A resolution entitled "Rebuilding Transatlantic Relations through Building Relationships", which was

<sup>33</sup> Harmonized EU approach in curbing COVID-19, Resolution adopted at virtual YEPP Council meeting, 18 April 2020

<sup>34</sup> YEPP Resolutions adopted by EPP Congress in Zagreb, 14 November 2019

adopted at a YEPP Council meeting in Stockholm and would later become EPP policy, called on the European Commission to launch an transatlantic academic exchange program modelled on Erasmus. In November 2022, Pereira became the first YEPP President to participate in the Transatlantic Legislatures Dialogue in Washington D.C, a policy exchange forum between MEPs and US representatives. Building on this, YEPP is working to re-launch the Transatlantic Youth Summit, with the first edition of the conference since 2015 scheduled to take place in summer 2023.

Lidia's mandate has also been characterised by efforts to raise the issue of climate change on EPP's political agenda. In this regard, Pereira has led by example: running a carbon-neutral campaign contesting the 2019 European elections. In her activities as MEP, Pereira serves as EPP liaison at COP27, the annual climate summit. Successful and credible action on climate change is essential for EPP to win the votes of young Europeans, many of whom have been engaged around the issue through Greta Thurnburg's protest movement.







## Towards a Bright Future: The Role of YEPP in the Next 25 years?



In 2022, YEPP celebrated its 25th anniversary. It has now been ¼ of a century since representatives of two competing organisations met in a Brussels hotel for a weekend of robust debate and discussion about how to build a united future, where the voices of young people from across Europe would be represented at the highest levels of EU policy.

In today's climate of division and political fragmentation, there is so much inspiration we can take from the example set by YEPP's founders. It is in this spirit that we mark this important date in YEPP's calendar: celebrating the achievements of all those who have contributed to YEPP's successes over the years with a renewed commitment to deliver in the years ahead.

Since first being elected YEPP President in 2018, not a single day has passed where I was not immensely proud to lead our dynamic organisation. I am equally conscious of the responsibility that comes with this to maintain YEPP's status as Europe's strongest youth political organisation.

I want to use this opportunity to thank all of those who have contributed to YEPP over the years, particularly those who have served on YEPP Boards. These are young people from the four corners of Europe and beyond who have made immense sacrifices to ensure that YEPP can succeed. It is not every person in their 20s who will

willingly give up their time to organise a YEPP event or write a YEPP resolution. But YEPP's people are different: they are motivated by values and possess the work ethic required to deliver on them.

When we reflect on the contributions that YEPP has made to EU policy, it is clear we have a great deal to be proud of. I believe this is important to acknowledge as too often, people dismiss the value of including young voices in the decision-making process. The European Union has changed fundamentally in the years since YEPP was formed but at each stage of this progression, YEPP has evolved too, adapting to new realities and offering innovative solutions for the challenges of the day. On so many issues, it has been YEPP that has taken the lead on EPP policy.

Equally, we cannot bask on our achievements. We must redouble our efforts so that in the future, a YEPP President can celebrate its 50th anniversary with the same level of pride that I feel today. We cannot be naive. The issues facing the EU today are as varied as they are complex. The challenges posed by uncontrolled technological progress, the climate crisis, migration, the economic recovery from COVID or Europe's demographic decline weigh heavily on us all. This list can often appear endless. Facing a future of such uncertainty, it is unsurprising that so many young people have lost faith in politics and are tempted by reductive populist alternatives. But we know better. We know the populists are wrong and we know that it is policy guided by our values and inspired by our rich tradition that offers Europe's young people the brightest future. Our challenge is to take EU politics out of Brussels and into the lives of European youth. If we do not speak openly and honestly with young people, how can we truly claim to represent them?

In a world of so much change, it is more important than ever that we do not lose sight of our values.

Dear friends of YEPP: here's to the next 25 years! Lets get to work.

Lídia Pereira, YEPP President

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YOUTH OF THE EPP

## 25 Years on the Right Side of History



In 2022, the Youth of the European People's Party (YEPP) marked the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of its formation. Since then, YEPP has grown to become Europe's largest youth political organisation, representing more than 1,000,000 young people from every corner of Europe and beyond.

Over the years, YEPP has served as a forum for young Europeans to have their voices heard in Europe's key debates and contribute meaningfully to the policy process. More than this however, it provides an outlet for young people interested in politics to meet likeminded peers and build friendships that endure over the years.

While the most obvious example of YEPP's success can be seen through the YEPP alumni who have progressed to take seats at the highest levels of EU and domestic politics, these paths were often paved by less visible contributions to YEPP resolutions and debates in remote corners of Europe.

This publication charts that journey, celebrating YEPP's contribution to EU policy over the past 25 years and recognising the successes and challenges YEPP faced on the way.

### **About the author:**

Gareth Gregan is a graduate of Economics and Political Science from Trinity College Dublin. A lifelong member of Fine Gael, for four years he worked at the Press Department of the European People's Party HQ and now works as an EU Policy Analyst in the Tech Sector.