



## **Draft Working Paper**

### **A Europe fit for Future Generations**

*Towards a platform for the 2009 European Parliament Elections*

*Prepared by hosting organisation Young Fine Gael*

Elections are the lifeblood of any political organisation. As the only pan-European election, the European Parliament elections are naturally important for YEPP. As such, one year out from the European Parliament elections, the theme of this working paper is suitably broad. It ranges from discussion of climate change, economic and social development, the political future of our Union, and the future of the Common Agricultural Policy amongst other issues. These are of immediate short-term concern for Europe, yet they are also issues which cannot be divorced from the longer-term health and vitality of the European Union. While these issues require action - of a decisive nature - in the short-term, the consequences of these actions will reverberate for many generations into the future.

This working paper proposes no ready answers to these problems. Rather we propose to use this working paper to review aspects of the political programme agreed in Stockholm, in order to kick-start an internal debate on the 2009 elections, so that if YEPP wishes to, it will be in a position to make a substantial contribution to both the EPP's and each member organisation's campaign. As we consider YEPP's policy contribution to the 2009 elections, it is important that we are proactive,. We must pay considerable attention to the principles of inter-generational justice.

In addition, YEPP's contribution to the European Parliamentary elections in 2009 should be strategically and policy oriented. There is a wealth of knowledge within YEPP in political campaigning which should be shared in order to provide real value to members organisations in their individual campaigns. Furthermore, as the EPP element of the national campaigns by our mother parties assumes greater prominence over time, it may potentially be desirable for YEPP to take a more public role. Potential options in this regard are discussed below.

### **The Political Future**

***“Although we keep our strong belief in the draft Constitutional Treaty, it seems a lost cause....We feel very disappointed on this. Our future lies not in a weaker but in stronger European co-operation.***

***The question of today is the road ahead; an alternative for the Constitution in its current shape.***

***Crucial for the European integration process are the conditions, upon which the current treaties are to be modified in order to make the working and the decision-making of the EU more efficient, more transparent and more democratic.”***

*Tomorrow's Answers Start Today – YEPP Main Political Program 2007-09*

***“the European Union should be clear on its values and stand for them at any time”***

*Resolution on Ambitions for the EU Treaty - 2007*

The Lisbon Treaty contains many necessary reforms for the European Union institutionally, and as such its ratification and implementation must be supported. Through the expansion of QMV in a large number of areas, as well as limiting the size of the Commission, it will allow speedier and more efficient decision making in a wide variety of areas in the European Union. Importantly, it strengthens the roles of national parliaments in the decision making processes. However this Treaty is not a final resting point, we believe that the democratic goals of the European integration remain important. YEPP supports further measures to build up a stronger common European identity based on common European values.

The strengthening of the link between the president of the European Commission and the Parliamentary elections within the Lisbon Treaty will present a real opportunity to improve the perception of a democratic deficit in the Union. It is important that the process in which this position is filled is one open to public scrutiny and engagement. Similarly, it is important that an individual free from personal reproach and with a history of commitment to the European Union is chosen. YEPP should not be afraid of participating in the debate as to who should fulfil this position, and championing a particular candidate.

#### **Challenges for YEPP;**

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- How should YEPP contribute to further debates on European integration process?
- In advance of the election, should YEPP support the EPP running a candidate for the Presidency of the Commission, as has been proposed?

#### **The Lisbon Agenda – The Economic Wellbeing of the Union**

***“The re-launch of the Lisbon Agenda in 2005 has strengthened the governance by introducing a three-years-cycle and by putting a strong emphasis on partnership***

***and ownership. Yet, implementation of the necessary Lisbon challenges by the member states is insufficient. The use of best practices and peer pressure has not lived up to expectations in all areas. We call upon the EU institutions and the EU council to ensure more effective follow-up of economic policy recommendations to which Member States agreed. Governments have to fulfil their promises. The Commission should name and shame the government which fail to deliver.***

...

***Under the influence of increasing globalization, the European Union must increasingly transform to an innovation-driven economy, with countries and regions competing on the basis of quality, innovation and creativity... The European Union, as a whole, invest too little in research and development...We urge the EU and member states not to miss the innovation boat....”***

***After all, Europe, more than other parts in the world, depends on the brains and the creativity of its people. It is that creativity with an entrepreneurial spirit, which will produce new goods, new services and new jobs in highly competitive global company. The building of a knowledge based economy is a goal that Europeans, and particular us a young generation, can identify with and adhere to.”***

*Tomorrow's Answers Start Today – YEPP Main Political Program 2007-09*

In Stockholm, YEPP placed the economic reform agenda at the heart of its political programme. As was highlighted in the Commission's report in December 2007 on the Lisbon Agenda, real progress has been made since the strategy was re-launched in 2005. Almost 6.5 million jobs have been created, which is a substantial achievement worthy of

note. Productivity growth has increased to 1.5% from 1.2%. The participation rate overall has reached 66%, inching closer to the targeted 70% level, whilst the female participation rate target of 60% is in prospect of being reached with the current level now at 57.2%. Through the Better Regulation agenda, the Commission has taken a pro-active lead in reducing the administrative burden on businesses, which is resulting in real benefits for companies, particularly in the SME sector.

Unfortunately, much of this improvement has to do with cyclical growth factors, rather than the impact of the Lisbon Agenda or other European Union reforms. While the rhetoric of Member States continues to remain impressive, in too many instances their actions do not match. Despite publicly emphasising the importance of Research and Development on numerous occasions since the Lisbon Agenda was first introduced, R&D expenditure as a portion of GDP across the Union fell in 2006.

Although the Better Regulation is being driven at a European level by the Commission, member-states are also to commit in the coming months to a similar reduction in the administrative burden imposed by domestic regulations. This has the potential to provide a significant boost to businesses in general, in particular SMEs and start-up companies which are essential to the long-term economic prosperity of the Union. However, it would appear from statements from national governments to date that there will be a wide divergence in the level of reduction in administrative burden, in what areas this reduction will apply, and the model used to determine the cost.

In developing Europe as a knowledge economy, one area to which we must pay close attention is that of internet communications. Across Europe there is a wide disparity between the quality of the internet available, speeds and usage by the general public. The OECD broadband league tables show a small group of European countries competing

with the other leaders in this area, Japan and Korea. Unfortunately, most European countries are towards the bottom end of the league. Given YEPP's commitment to solidarity between individuals and states within the Union, the increasing digital divide between member states, but also between segments of internal societies should be of concern.

For a youth political grouping two particular statistics should be noted with concern. Firstly the youth unemployment remains at a particularly high level – at December 2007, it stood at 14.8% amongst under 25, compared to 6.8% for the rest of the workforce. In addition, as is stated in the Commission's report "one out of every five 15-year olds in Europe cannot read sufficiently. One out of every six 18 to 24-year olds has dropped out of school with no more than lower secondary education." In an era when low-skilled jobs are generally leaving the Europe for Asia, the long-term consequences of this educational failure are obvious.

In order to see that the targets of the Lisbon Agenda are met in the future, the process should be reformed so that the Commission become the key-player in achieving those targets. [proposal by YFG, JSD, MHDZ]

Challenges for YEPP;

- 1) Research and Development – Can YEPP take a lead in promoting a model for increased R&D co-operation between private enterprise and educational institutes?
- 2) Education & youth unemployment – How can we challenge the problem of young people entering the employment market under skilled and ill-prepared?
- 3) Business Regulations – Can we support the reduction of business regulation further, and can it be targeted to support young entrepreneurs in particular?

- 4) Internet – How can the Union as a whole be a leader in broadband penetration, speed and usage?
- 5) Institutionally - how can the Union better deliver the Lisbon Agenda – how should the initiative be passed from the Council to the Commission?

### **Energy Security and Climate Change**

***“As a neighbouring country Russia is a natural partner in energy supply. However, Europe must diversify its energy mix, as well as the sources and transport routes for imported natural gas, in order to prevent monopolising attempts.***

***Special attention should be paid to nuclear energy [with open debates on the issue encouraged]...***

***We welcome the creation of a coherent, cost efficient, reliable, competitive and ecologically clean energy policy... It is high time to concentrate thoroughly on investment into energy research, especially on efficiency and alternatives to hydrocarbons.***

***We call for a long-term plan to be made, reducing European climate emissions. It is obvious that the global climate is changing and disregarding a human impact on this is not only ignorant but also dangerous. As so many challenges before, the one of climate change – at least the dangerous effects of it – remains an issue of solidarity. ”***

*Tomorrow's Answers Start Today – YEPP Main Political Program 2007-09*

The primary aims of the Stockholm Congress in the area of energy and of climate change have been significantly progressed in the past year. The Lisbon Treaty, if ratified, will see energy policy coordination strengthened across the European Union, allowing the Union to adopt a single voice on Energy matters. This will be an important step, as the dangers of over-dependence on Russian energy supplies has been further exacerbated by investment by Russian state companies in the energy infrastructure outside of her borders. The issue of energy diversification remains a particularly important one, and the challenges outlined in Stockholm continue to need addressing.

Furthermore, the proposals of the Commission on climate action and renewal energy are particularly noteworthy. They contain much the same spirit as was seen in the Political Programme agreed in Stockholm, and as such is worthy of our support. However, they will present a challenge to the ambition of member-states and the European public to implement such dramatic changes. It will be a significant test of political leadership at a national level in each member state to ensure that these ambitions are met.

A number of challenges present themselves in this area, which YEPP can significantly engage with in this area;

- 1) the willingness of member-states to accept and implement the targets in the Climate Action and Renewal Energy proposals;
- 2) the issues surrounding bio-fuels, which form a key part of the Climate action and Renewable Energy proposals, and the rise in food commodity prices;
- 3) the issue of creating an informed and sustained public debate on nuclear power;  
and
- 4) the manner in which the diversification of Europe's energy supply is to take.

### **Political Campaigning**



In addition to providing a strong manifesto for itself, and also to contribute to the internal debates within the EPP and our own member organisations when it comes to formulating their own election manifestos, YEPP should give serious consideration to the issue of political campaigning in the forthcoming parliamentary election.

Although there are some exceptions, it is generally true to say that European Parliamentary elections have failed to engage public attention. Turnout is generally low, in 2004 only 45% turnout was recorded across the Union. As such, even a small increase in turnout will have a significant impact on electoral results.

Within YEPP, there is a huge wealth of experience and knowledge of political campaigning. While some aspects of the political campaigns that member organisations run are distinctly local, there are also much commonalities between the techniques and methods used to attract public attention and support across all European states. Young people across Europe share much in common, and as such YEPP organisations should, at a suitable juncture from the election, share their experiences of what has and what has not worked in various different election campaigns.

In addition, it is useful for YEPP to seek to promote young candidates from across our member organisations. YEPP has in the past taken the initiative in building up a network of young MEPs, it may be also useful in identifying young politicians from amongst the candidates selected by our respective mother parties, publishing their number and general information about them. If such information were available, it would allow young candidates and our own member organisations to highlight the influence of youth within the EPP.

## **Conclusions**

The European Parliamentary election in 2009 present an opportunity for YEPP to play an even stronger role in the EPP and in member organisations campaigns, as well as in YEPP's own right. However, for such ambitions to be realised, it is imperative that this is done well in advance of the European Elections – before the national campaigns have begun.

Rather than offer definitive conclusions on the subject, this working paper aims to kick-start an internal debate within YEPP on the European Elections, and YEPP's role within that.

YEPP, we can!!!