

**FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN PROGRESSIVE STUDIES  
(FEPS)**

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**SIXTH ANNUAL CALL TO EUROPE CONFERENCE  
BRUSSELS 17-18 JUNE 2016**

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**MILLENNIALS AND POLITICS**

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Jean-Michel Content, Secretary-General, Nelly Voyeux, Assistant Secretary-General and Kevin P O'Kelly, member of the Executive Committee, represented the AIPF/IAFP at the FEPS Annual Conference.

This year the conference dealt with the findings of the studies on the attitudes of millennials to politics. The study was carried out in eighteen countries worldwide. The two-day conference examined ways in which politics can better engage with young people at national and EU levels, as well as exploring how to facilitate millennials in having their voices heard. Participants included political leader, NGOs, artists, media and music representatives with millennials to examine ways to grow this conversation into a genuine international dialogue.

**Opening Session**

The conference was held in conjunction with the Group of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament (S&D Group). In opening the conference, Ernst Stetter, FEPS Secretary General, said that there are an estimated 1.8 billion millennials world wide, the largest generation in history.

Frans Timmermans, First Vice-President of the European Commission, addressed the opening session. In his remarks he observed that millennials have a different attitude to politics from generations that have gone before and the party political system has not moved to accommodate these changed attitudes. He outlined a number of dangers he sees with regard to current politics, such as:

- A number of 'strong' political leaders who are attractive to the millennial generation, even if they don't tell the truth
- The unemployment crisis in EU Member States, which the political right blame on immigration
- The EU has, in the past, over-promised and under-delivered. The focus of the Juncker Commission is on fixing things – gaining trust takes a long time, but losing trust can happen very fast!!
- The weakness of the millennial generation is that, in his view, they are not organised and don't get together to reform party political – he called for greater political engagement from millennials
- He pointed to the findings of the FEPS study that shows that the leading concerns of millennials are: healthcare; education; job creation – the social democracy political agenda! On education Mr

Timmermans said that EU Member States need to double its expenditure in this policy area. The one great success of the EU is the Erasmus and Erasmus+ Programmes for third-level students to spend part of the studies in another Member State.

- Economic growth and the re-distribution of wealth are needed to achieve a Social Europe.

Mr Timmermans finished his opening address by again calling on millennials to get politically organised.

In the debate that followed, employment, education and culture dominated. There was also contributions on gender politics and how to tackle poverty and hunger in Europe.

### **Workshops**

Participants had a range of workshops to choose from and the AIPF/IAFP representatives participated in workshops on *Millennials and Employment* and *Millennials and Education* (first day); *The UK Referendum and the future of Europe* and *Youth UP – For More Youth-inclusive Politics*, on the second day.

### **Other presentations**

To close the first day, Massimo D'Alema, President of FEPS and former Prime Minister of Italy, and Elio Di Rupo, Leader of PS and former Prime Minister of Belgium, debated the situation with progressive politics in Europe and the role millennials can play in the future.

Following the workshops on the morning of day 2, Pascal Lamy, Vice-President of FEPS and former Director General of the World Trade Organisation, spoke of the greatest global issue for coming generations are the environment and climate change. He said that he is chairing a FEPS forum on this issue and would publish a 'platform' for the future in 2018.

Also on the second day, there was an international panel with speakers from South Africa, Mozambique and the US, each of who commented on the Millennial Study findings in each of their countries. Ms Duduetsang Mokoale from South Africa, talked about the challenge of millennials getting the opportunities to be involved in politics – Africa is the youngest continent but the average age of its political leaders (presidents) is 78.6 years! In this context, Paulo Wache said that Mozambique is a very young country, with approximately 8 million millennials and 54% of the population is living in absolute poverty.

The speaker from the US, Layla Zaidane, said that there is a need for the political process to meet millennials where they are, on issues that concern them and to do this the media they use must be the way to engage them.

### **Final Session**

Massimo D'Alema gave the closing address to the conference. He observed that millennials have their own agenda. They are not 'non-political', but don't trust the current political construct and they are not attracted to present day political parties. However, millennials are largely in favour of greater European integration, but they don't like the EU as it is today – they are concerned with, as the surveys show, healthcare, jobs, education and equality: all social democratic issues. Unfortunately, modern social democratic parties seem unable to pursue these issues.

Finally, he said that, unfortunately, modern political parties are not using new technologies and he called on political parties to engage with millennials through new technologies, as the old ways of communicating don't work anymore. He called on millennials to 'innovate with courage in the 'we can do' politics'

### **Comment**

This conference was very useful to the AIPF/IAFP in understanding the views and attitudes of the millennial generation, in the context of its study on their attitudes to financial participation. The young people who participated in the conference were a very articulate group with clear views as to how they see the modern high-tech world in which they live, their political priorities and how they want to engage in the political process. Also, the discussion sessions, the use of a 'four-panel' debate format and the application of technology, including social media, during the conference was very interesting.

Kevin P O'Kelly  
June 2016

See: <http://www.calltoeurope.eu> and [www.feps.eu](http://www.feps.eu)