



EUth for Democracy

GR Team



OVERVIEW

The European Parliament is the primary legislative body of the European Union with supervisory and budgetary responsibilities. Considering this, it is evident that participation in the European elections is of utmost importance, since citizens have the opportunity to influence the future direction of the Union.

Voting, in general, is also one of the most important functions of a Democracy and individual freedoms. The European Elections of 2019 had the highest turnout since the Elections of 1994, with significant increase in younger voters¹. Encouraging as this may be, as it signifies the active involvement of young people in the European Politics, it bears the question: **what is the quality of the European citizens' votes?**

MAIN PROBLEM

The participation in the 1981 European Parliament elections - the first since Greece became a member of the European Economic Community - was 81.48%. Almost 40 years later, in the 2019 elections, this rate has decreased to 58.69%. However, it remains one of the highest turnout rates amongst the EU member states^{2,3}. Apparently, in the last EP elections there was an adequate percentage of participation. Nevertheless, the quality of the vote is under question. Some people express their concern that young voters, including Generation-Z⁴, are not sure or well informed what the EP elections really are.

“Do Greek citizens, especially the young ones, vote consciously? How responsible is the young people’s vote? “

After conducting a small survey asking seven peers from our everyday environment, a controversy was revealed. Although a 2/3 of those asked voted in the last EU elections, their voting criteria were not based on personal research or knowledge. In most cases, young voters were influenced to a great extent by their families and their close environment. Moreover, as ordered by the Standard Eurobarometer 2019⁵, 60% of the

¹ European Parliament. 2019. Final turnout data for 2019 European elections announced | News | European Parliament. [online] Available at: <<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20191029IPR65301/final-turnout-data-for-2019-european-elections-announced>> (17/04/2021)

² It should be mentioned that compulsory voting is the law in Greece but is not enforced.

³ The overall turnout of the last EU Elections was 50,66%. Greece was the country with the 8th highest turnout in the last EU elections according to the official data of the European Parliament. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/chart/18172/turnout-by-country-at-the-european-elections>> (16/04/2021)

⁴ According to the Cambridge Dictionary: “*Generation-Z is the group of people who were born in the US and Western Europe after 2001*”. Available at: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/generation-z> (16/04/2021)

⁵ Available at: <<https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinionmobile/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/surveyKy/2253>> (16/04/2021)

Greek respondents think that their interests are not represented in the and only a 36% is satisfied with the way democracy works in the EU. They are quite uninformed, or more likely misinformed, about the EU institutions and their competences.

On the eve of those revelations, an inevitable question is raised.

“How do those people vote about their representatives in the European level, while they don’t actually know how the EU project functions?”

Consequently, the lack of qualitative, if we can call it this way, vote in Greece, could mask the unofficial feeling of being unrepresented, creating a democratic deficit in a national and supranational level as well. Thus, it is considered a problem that both the national government and the EU ought to offer solutions.

In order to scrutinize whether this **pathogeny** really exists, our team decided to conduct a more comprehensive survey, creating a questionnaire which was forwarded to 280 participants from different regions of Greece, with various social and educational backgrounds, the majority of them being 17-24 years old. The results of the survey strongly supported our hypothesis. Particularly, 72% of the participants claimed to participated in the European elections held in 2019. This is a very encouraging percentage for Greece, considering that the participation rate in the national elections of 2019 was 57.78%. At the same time, it is an indication of participants that are, on average, more politically active than the average citizen. Even so, when the participants were asked whether they considered themselves fully informed regarding the upcoming elections, 43%, about half of the participants, answered that they were not considerably informed⁶! In other words, almost half of the participants felt that they hadn't been up-to-date with the European reality during the election period.

Furthermore, when asked on the basis of which criteria they voted in the elections, 49% of the participants claimed that they had read the political program of the party they voted for. However, 13% of them claimed that they voted for the same party as their family did. Finally, in order to examine whether the participants know some basic information about the European elections, we decided to add several questions regarding their general knowledge about the EU, asking the participants not to look for the answers online. The first one required our participants to answer whether the national parties are the same at both the national and the European level. One in five participants answered that the parties are the same, while 1/3 admitted that they did not know. The next question asked the participants to choose, out of three possible answers, the group of existing parties in the European Parliament. For this question, we included six (6) made-

⁶ The chose the option “2”, from a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 indicating “not at all” and 5 “very much”.

up parties, aiming for them to appear plausible. Once again, the results were shocking. 56% of the participants, who claimed to have participated in the elections, answered that they did not know which answer was the correct one, whereas 24.1% chose the wrong answer.

These shocking results identified the main aspects of our “problematique” we move to provide a set of solutions.

SOLUTIONS

We can all agree that boosting young people's participation in society, especially regarding the participation in the common European life, is perhaps the biggest challenge in the process of deepening the European integration and creating social prosperity.

“Sustaining European democracy is a shared value and goal”

Our approach tries to combine civic education with empowering young people to take an active part in the life of their communities, so they can shape the national and European policies and politics better. Our primary goal:

“Reaching out young people who are not interested or involved in Politics and enable their creativity in the service of the common European values”

To deal with this, we strongly advocate for some key priorities to take place in our national context:

/ . Create Physical and Virtual Spaces for the Political Participation of Young People

We came to the conclusion that in order to help young people understand better the value of political participation and have more influence on public policy and political decision making, actions should be taken so young people i) be involved in meetings with politicians, when important decisions are taken ii) have more physical spaces to meet young people and discuss politics iii) have an access to youth-friendly information and digital platforms where they can share their views and contribute to the policy-making process.

/ . Develop a better national framework for Civic and Citizenship Education

Youth work and Citizenship education at schools have a key role in supporting youth in their emancipation, leading solidarity and de-radicalization actions and enhancing partici-

pation and self-efficacy in society. The rise of right-wing populism on the one and fake news on the other hand finds the Education for Democratic Citizenship with young people in a biased position between democratic competences development and preventing from anti-pluralist and anti-democratic temptation. Schools and youth work organizations should create synergies and work together to address the need for a better and more sustainable participation of young people in their local, national and European context. The goal is not only to increase the turnout, which is relevant high in Greece, but also provide a better sense of the responsibility to be an active citizen.

To illustrate this with an example, we came with the creation of action groups run by students of European and Political Studies, which will voluntarily address the need for a wider information and participation of young people in European proceedings. Via these action groups, not only the interest of young Europeans will be increased, but also students of European and political studies will be given the opportunity to reproduce and transmit the knowledge they acquire from the university. In order to facilitate this procedure, programs such as Erasmus+ and Jean Monnet projects should become more citizen-friendly. The proposal submission process should be simplified, whereas the selection criteria shall be more flexible

/. Establish youth participatory mechanisms such as participatory budgeting, youth councils

The main objectives of these youth participation schemes is to create a clear general policy framework in order to increase civic participation of young people through dedicated participatory processes for youth which can connect European policies (European Youth Strategy, Youth Goals etc) with local level practical implementation and also to provide participatory environments for young people and for public authorities based on trust, assistance and easy access and with the active contribution of the civil society.

/. Connect the EPLO and the MEPs with young people

We believe that a more productive cooperation can take place between the EP Liaison Office, schools and also youth-led organizations. In this framework, joint initiatives can take place where young people, with the support of the EPLO, can organize events related to topics of common European interest (e.g. Environment, Erasmus+). Moreover, a communication channel should be created where young people and youth groups can invite, ask and discuss with MEPs. Both actions could create stronger vertical ties with the EU institutions. To that end, establish a periodical EPLO review of its contribution to youth engagement coupled with tangible indicators and creative video roadmaps.

APPENDIX

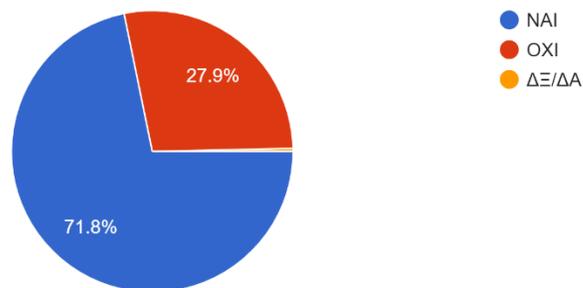
APPENDIX 1.

In this section we will present some of the questions that were in the survey.

1. *Did you vote in the last EU elections (May 2019)?*

YES: 71.8% NO: 27.9%

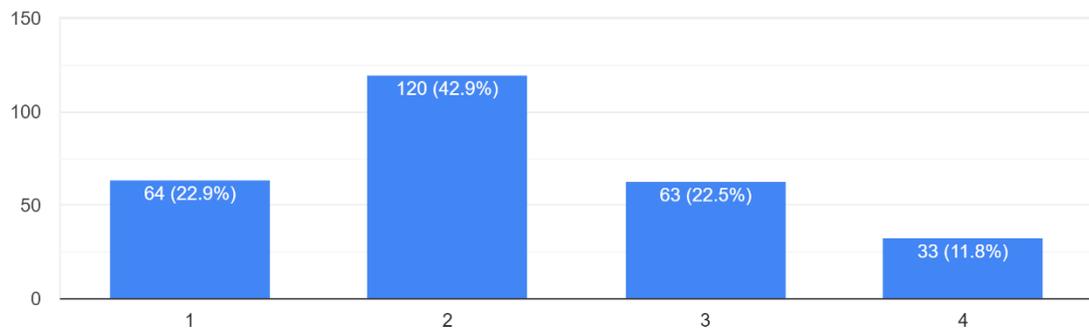
Είχατε συμμετέχει στις τελευταίες Ευρωεκλογές (Μάιος 2019);
280 responses



2. *Do you believe that on the election's day were you well informed about the European Parliament and the European Union?*

1: 22.9% 2: 42.9% 3: 22.5% 4: 11.8%

Θεωρείτε ότι την ημέρα των Ευρωεκλογών ήσασταν επαρκώς ενημερωμένοι για το Ευρωκοινοβούλιο και την Ευρωπαϊκή Ένωση;
280 responses



3. In case you voted in the last EU elections, do you know if the political parties are the same both at a national and a European level?

SAME: 20.9% DIFFERENT: 31.4% [CORRECT] DON'T KNOW: 45.5%

Στην περίπτωση που ψηφίσατε στις τελευταίες Ευρωεκλογές θα θέλαμε να μας απαντήσετε στο παρακάτω ερώτημα. Γνωρίζετε αν τα πολιτικά κόμμα... είναι τα ίδια σε εθνικό και ευρωπαϊκό επίπεδο;
220 responses



4. In case you voted in the last EU elections, which of the following option represent existing parties of the European Parliament? (Please answer the question without searching the correct information)

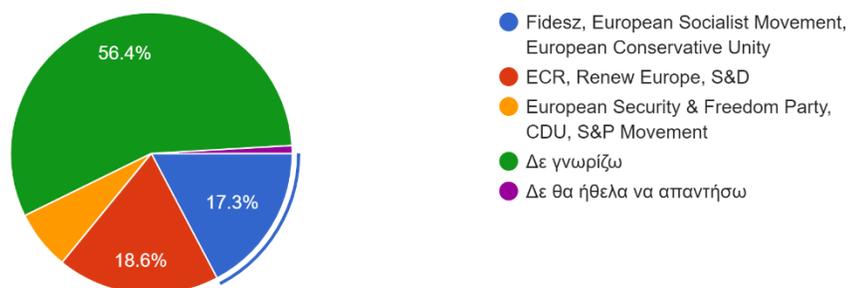
Fidesz, European Socialist Movement, European Conservative Unity: 17.3%

ECR, Renew Europe, S&D: 18.6% [CORRECT]

European Security & Freedom Party, CDU, S&P Movement: 6.8%

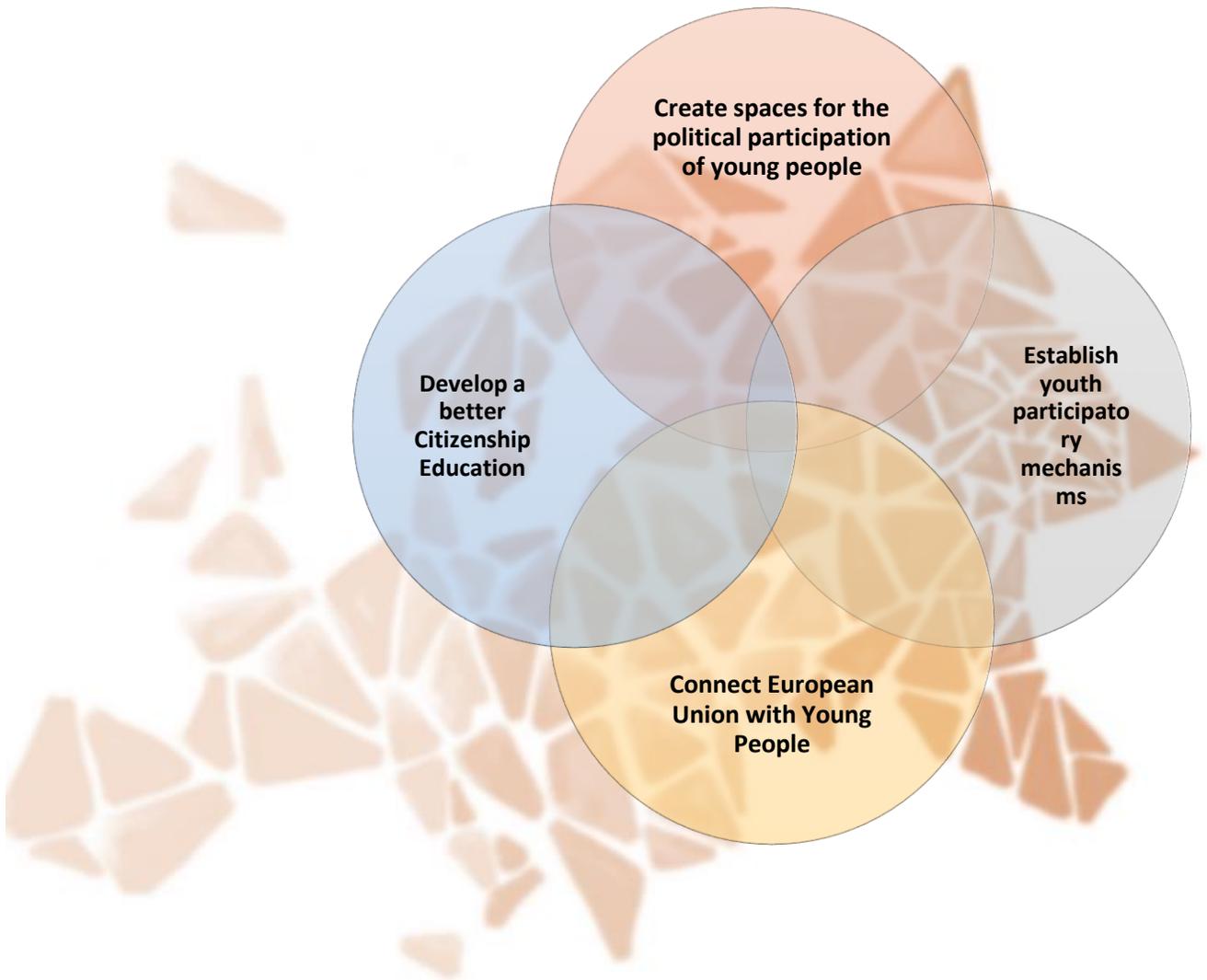
DON'T KNOW: 56.4%

Σε περίπτωση που ψηφίσατε στις τελευταίες Ευρωεκλογές θα θέλαμε να μας απαντήσετε στο παρακάτω ερώτημα χωρίς να αναζητήσετε την ορ...υπαρκτά κόμματα του Ευρωπαϊκού Κοινοβουλίου;
220 responses



APPENDIX 2.

The solution proposal in a graphical illustration.



APPENDIX 3.

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APPENDIX 4.

DISCLAIMER

Our study, like any other, had a set of limitations, which need to be clarified for this paper to retain a high level of integrity.

1. Our preliminary inquiries were short interviews from four young men and two women (ages 20-22) from the social environment of the authors and hence they can only be regarded as a first idea of the Greek civic education circle.
2. As regards the second, more comprehensive research, 65% of the participants were female while 35% were male. 88% were aged 17-24 while only 12% percent aged 25-29.
3. From the above it becomes prevalent that the majority of our sample came from women and that the age group from 25-29 had a small representation.
4. Despite our relatively small sample, our findings are corroborated by the recent Eurobarometer outcomes and as a result can be deemed fairly representative.