

Professor Danuta Hübner, PhD
Chair of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs, European Parliament

Remarks at the panel “Bringing Europe closer to its citizens: what are the best practices of the national parliaments?”

The Plenary Meeting of the Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs of Parliaments of the European Union

27 November 2017, Tallin, Estonia

Capacity of the EU construction to work and deliver depends not only on formal laws, Treaties, institutions or political will and cohesion of the national leaders. It depends also, and I would say increasingly, on the commitment of citizens to the European integration and values we share. In this context, I would like to say a few words on one group of European citizens -young European citizens.

Today, young people of Europe are far more likely than older citizens to share European identity across member states. We could see in the British referendum that young Brits had more in common with their colleagues on the continent than with the older generation of British voters.

We witness, however, a certain paradox that is the challenge for all of us here to cope with. While polls show young people among the most convinced Europeans, they are largely absent from the fight for Europe.

At the same time, for them European Union is a natural environment in which they grew up. In such environment human beings and citizens tend to find flaws and deficiencies and sometimes the tiniest ones generate criticism and rejection attitudes. As a result, the young Europeans tend to see Europe as stale and corrupted by political compromise.

When you look at what young people say under their hashtags on Europe, you can see that they want to influence European policies, that they want a greater participation in formation of political parties, that they want new technologies to facilitate a more direct European democracy, which they want to be owners of European project already now. I have to admit, I sympathize with their impatience.

However, of course they express their affinity for the Union differently than the preceding generations. Therefore, we often do not respond to their desires. Now this is the highest time to open Europe for them. They are the future leaders of the EU.