



# YOUNG PEOPLE ARE INTERESTED IN MORE THAN “YOUTH”

*by Maj Jensen Christensen*

*#EP2019: the S&D parties @  
TheProgressives had a good  
result with some young voters -  
but much needs to be done!  
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Looking at the detailed analysis of the election results, the S&D Group came out as the winners among the young electorate in the recent European elections. A little more than 20 % of people aged 18-24 voted for the progressive group. This was a little better than the EPP and way better than the Greens, who got less than 16% among the young.

On the basis of those numbers you might say the “fair, free and sustainable Europe”-campaign has been successful among the young, and I could end my piece here. But the S&D is only biggest among the youngest group of the electorate: the “Generation Z”, those between 18 and 25. Among the “Millennials” (aged 25-34) - and every other generation – the EPP came out strongest. On the contrary, the Greens may not be the biggest group among any generation on European level, but it was their strong support among the

younger generation in some Member States that led to their improved results.

However, all these numbers are aggregated projections for Europe as a whole. When going a step further in examining the details, things turn out to be more diverse. The result of 20% of the youngest voters in Europe for the centre-left hides the fact that S&D parties were indeed biggest among young people in the UK, but only received, for example, around 7% of the young votes in Germany, where the Greens’ huge support among the young voters secured their electoral success.

The same goes for the “Fair, free and sustainable Europe”-campaign. It no doubt had an impressive impact in the Netherlands where our common candidate Frans Timmermans was on the ballot himself. But in several other countries “Fair, free and sustainable”

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was not even the slogan of the campaign. In Germany the slogan was “Europe is the answer” (Europa ist die Antwort), in Denmark “Together we fight the fight in Europe” (Sammen tager vi kampen i Europa) and in the UK it read “Transforming Britain and Europe for the many, not the few”.

In several of the national campaign, the focus on young people was absent. If a party is cynically focusing on vote-maximisation (and most parties have to), it is hard to blame it for not focusing much on the young generations: the population of Europe is ageing, and young generations only make up around 26% of the general population. In addition, they are less likely to vote in the European elections than other generations. But perhaps exactly because of this it is so important that the progressive family makes an effort to engage the new generations.

Far too often “connecting with the young people” is limited to having that token-one young person in the panel or that one page on “youth policy” in the political manifesto. But our generations are not just interested in “youth policy”. We are interested in all policies concerning our generation: from the cuts on education to the lack of decent jobs and affordable housing. And also: pension age as well as the amounts. And of course, the climate crisis - the very basis of our future on this earth.

Talking about the life situation of young people and how to improve it was something that Frans Timmermans did well in the debates. He touched on the precarious work situation for many young people and explained that the solution for this problem is systematic and political - not personal.

The same goes for tackling the climate crisis. We will not be able to do what is necessary if we leave it to individual choices. We need to regulate the big industries and the huge corporations.

Looking ahead, beyond the European elections, this is exactly what we need: A strong focus on improving the life-situation, not just for the young but for all. Recent years have seen setbacks in the quality of, security of and access to education, jobs, housing and public service. We don’t want to fight for a status quo, we want improvement. All of this is a job for the newly elected MEPs and the coming Commission. We want a Europe that works for us - and you can make it!



**> AUTHOR**

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