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In today's issue from the series "Now-Interacting with the EP", Radio Bulgaria, Portal Europe and the European Institute offer you an insight on the discussions held in Paris and Versailles on the subject "what European citizens, and especially the young, expect from tomorrow's MEPs";

The French partners along the project, Yvelines Radio, played host to the discussion, which took place in Versailles at the beginning of April. Then, at the EP representation in Paris experts, students of journalism and their tutors discussed the fundamental question TO VOTE or NOT TO VOTE in June. We offer you in this issue the opinions of the participants in these two events.

Mass media play a leading role in communication among MEPs and the citizens. Jean-Marc Bertin is President of Yvelines Radio, which is now offering its listeners programmes on the forthcoming vote.

"We at Yvelines Radio have been paying special attention to the European theme in the last 4 years, with the intention to expand even further our programming on the subject on the eve of the EP elections. It is especially important to convince our listeners that it is very important to go and vote at the beginning of June. Unfortunately, the French are not sufficiently motivated, perhaps because when we speak of Europe, messages are too technical and rather dry. Since citizens are not very interested in Europe, mass media also turn their backs on it. In another word – Europe is too far from us! We don't know our MEPs, we don't know how to contact them; they show no interest in us either. And the economic crisis doesn't help the European debate either. Any French paper you take will be telling of the crisis from its first page on. And yet, I personally believe that we should cast our vote. If not – others would be making decisions for us – economic decisions or about French cheese, or the outflow of capitals, etc. We should remember that democracy gets used up only if we don't put it to use often enough . . .";

Catherine Mutel represents the Confederation of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises in France /CDPME/. Do you know your MEPs? Do you succeed in sending through them your messages to Brussels and Strasbourg?

"Unfortunately I have to admit that I don't know my MEP and I think this problem exists both in the enterprises I represent and among average citizens, who are indeed unaware of what MEPs are doing and what cause they are defending. In other words, we are facing the acute problem of the lack of information and communication. Meanwhile, we know that a large part of the laws are voted in Brussels, where the decisions on our future are made. As to the role of women in business – we believe that there should be better access to business for women and that could happen through simpler procedures for crediting; by making their every-day family routine easier – in other words by trying to find the balanced formula for combining professional and family life."

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The events in Versailles and Paris allowed us to meet the winner in the contest “Europe beyond the sugar cubes and on the eve of elections 2009”. His name is Matthew Rushworth. He started his statement in French but continued in English, sharing his opinion on whether the next EP mandate would make Europe for us sweeter, saltier, bitterer or tasteless.

“Hello, I am happy to be the laureate of the contest, but since the European subject is very serious, would you allow me to continue in English. The elections at the end of the Czech Presidency mark the end of a hard decade for the EU – the countries have split in their opinions on Iraq, the European Constitution, and the Lisbon Treaty. Then came the financial and economic crisis and the management of the enlargement process. All these factors impose the need for us to work jointly on the principle of subsidiarity, because the EU is not trying to take up the functions of national governments. But there are spheres in which the EU does not function well enough – ecology, energy /nuclear energy included/, labour legislation, religious differences. That is why we should vote, especially young people – to make Europe work better. The next elections would be conducted according to the Nice Treaty. But when the Lisbon Treaty steps in force I think that Europe would find itself in the most favorable of conditions. The expansion of the procedure of joint decision-making /co-decision / would give it larger power and would make it stronger. That is why we should vote in June!”

The EP elections this year are taking place at a critical moment, when every EU citizen is facing the challenges of the world economic crisis and recession, which seem to be subduing all other topics. Would the crisis ruin Europe or on the contrary – would it emerge stronger and consolidated? We got on the matter the opinion of Alain Barrau, Director of the Information Bureau of the European Parliament in Paris.

“The most important thing now is to make the European nations realize that only through joint efforts can we cope with the economic crisis. But that also means that Europe should give fast answers to the expectations of its citizens. Europe should learn to adapt itself and react adequately and on time. The coming elections are of key importance to Europe and despite controversies within the Union we should not change the direction we have all chosen,” Alain Barrau said.

Having this in mind can we expect that the process of EU enlargement would stop here? Does a still larger Europe have a future?

“There is not a clear view in the European circles on this issue. As you might already know negotiations continue, but given the pressure exerted by the economic crisis, many of us tend to wait for hardships to go away, and for the balance to be restored. Once we take an upward course again, we can then consider further enlargement. This is the prevalent stance in the European Parliament despite differences of opinion among member states, political groups or parties. Yes, the crisis will slow down Europe’s enlargement.”

“My MEP and me – is the dialogue real or virtual?” – focused on this subject, the IPJ Institute for Journalism based in Paris polled French university students. How do they see Europe’s future and are the young likely to vote for the European cause? Listen to Nicolas and Chloé:

“I am half-French and half-Czech, so I think that Europe can do a lot for the 27. It is important to

go to the polls, because Europe can do a lot to help its citizens live better lives.”

“Of course, I am going to vote, and hopefully, many other people will do the same. I am 24 and I believe that I belong to a privileged generation. Europe exists because we have decided that we want to live together and to share the same values. Europe however has not been given to us once and forever, so we have to work for its cause every day. Let us be open to the world, rather than serving our small egocentric existence. It is important for nations to live in peace and understanding.”

The enthusiasm of young Europeans has been shared by their professor, French journalist Jean-Claude Duluc:

“We decided to carry out some research on “My MEP and Me”. The total of 22 teams with two journalists each focused on different aspects of the subject. Contrary to expectations, our students were surprised by the readiness and good will of European Parliament Members who responded promptly to their invitation for dialogue. One of my students told me she phoned Gérard Onesta, EP Vice-President, and he responded straight away. As to our conclusions, I think that everybody is aware now that national problems have European dimensions, and that decisions made in Brussels are easily transferred at the local level, in any of the member states. There is another point, too: the topics that may at first appear to be too technical and even humdrum, can easily be clarified to our audience once they are knitted into a story.”

At the end of the closing edition of our project *Now – interacting with the European Parliament* we give the floor to our precious interface in the campaign, Ognian Boyadzhiev, Gateway EUROPE, Editor-in-Chief:

“We are closing a project of the unexpected, because as it started a year ago, our team had no clear idea whether MEPs were accepted in similar ways across the 20 member countries where we work with our partners. Would there be more enthusiasm in, say, Bulgaria and Romania, compared to Old Europe? Now it has turned out that citizens share the same degree of responsibility and openness to EP, to Europe of tomorrow. What they need in addition is a little encouragement and a more direct contact with their deputies. To recap, I am an optimist even for the election turnout in June, because the next mandate will be quite momentous, and rather difficult for Europe. The good news is that our project continues with the motto *Interacting with the European Parliament*. The word “now” is out, making things look lasting and long term.”

This has been the closing installment in the project *Now – interacting with the European Parliament* carried out by the European Institute with the financial support of the General Directorate Communication at the European Parliament. All broadcasts have web versions on the Bulgarian National Radio website and on the specialized site <http://parliament.europe.bg>. Well, you already know that our cooperation continues. Thank you for being with us, and keep this message in mind – go to the polls! To rephrase great Victor Hugo, the alliance of freedom and fraternity will give birth to a general civil upsurge, the source of mankind’s great future, for the sake of life, peace and understanding in Europe.

Sofia-Paris-Sofia

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