Young European Conservatives in Brussels to discuss the future of Europe

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Conservatives across Europe gathered in Brussels for an event, organised by the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group, at the European Parliament to hammer out their suggestions for the future of European policymaking.

The young are at the core of the initiative and they discussed their vision of Europe, which values they have in common, and which are the next challenges for the conservative family.
Young conservatives in Brussels push their idea of Europe’s future

By Eleonora Vasques | euractiv.com

Young conservatives came together in Brussels to talk about how they see the future of Europe, in response to the Conference on the Future of Europe, the EU democracy experiment promoted by the institutions, where randomly selected citizens had a say in EU policymaking.

The organisers heavily criticised the experiment and organised the events with the young generation as a way to give more space to their idea of Europe.

Talks focused on how they see potential EU reform and what the EU should look like.

Ryszard Antoni Legutko from the Polish Law and Justice Party (PiS), was among those welcoming the young people on the first panel that took place on Wednesday (20 September).

The introductory panel was dedicated to describing how the EU – in particular the European Parliament – works, underlying which aspects of the institutions the group is critical of.

Legutko argued that in the EU there is an “asymmetry of powers” among the 27 member states and that this has become particularly marked since the Lisbon Treaty was signed in 2009.

“There is a tendency since the Lisbon Treaty to make this asymmetry a reality,” the ECR co-chair said.

Legutko described the European Parliament as “bizarre” when compared to national parliaments because MEPs can decide to sanction a country, such as Hungary, when there are rule of law issues.

“This is disgraceful, MEPs from other countries can punish another one,” he said.

Hungary and Poland are among the countries to have been sanctioned by the EU institutions in recent years after it was found that they had violated basic principles of democracy, such as the protection of minorities and the division of power and media independence.

The European Parliament declared last year that Hungary “is no longer a democracy”.

Other speakers included the Dutch ECR MEP Michiel Hoogeveen, which instead of the European Parliament as it is, proposed a parliament in which there should be “national politicians.

Many of the speakers used the phrase “Euro-realism” to describe the direction they want the European Union to pursue.

**The youngest**

During the first panel, identity politics was among the most discussed issues by the young delegates.

“Conservatism means for me being able to build a family, preserve tradition, being able to love and have kids without worrying what the Left people think,” Nanna Vaatainen told Euractiv.

Similarly, German delegate Niklas Kortling told Euractiv the event was a “great opportunity to connect with the others of the ECR party”.

He believes that even though national ECR parties can have different ideas on individual policies “we all share the same values”.

Italian MEP Carlo Fidanza described to the audience the “ideological agenda” of some multinational companies, which, he argued, were harming young generations, such as the idea of a “fluid society”.

“The influence of the commercial message of multinational corporations has espoused the ideological agenda for business reasons, which affects people’s customs. Forced ideologisation that comes from things like the ‘gender theory’ is too far from common sense and does not respect individual sensibility,” he argued during his speech.
EU needs a counterbalance to integration drive, say leading conservatives

By Benjamin Fox | euractiv.com

The EU should focus on doing less but doing it better, leading conservatives concluded following a two-day summit of young delegates in Brussels. [Carlo Fidanza, P&G]

EU needs a counterbalance to integration drive, say leading conservatives

The EU should focus on doing less but doing it better, leading conservatives concluded following a two-day summit of young delegates in Brussels this week, as they seek to counter the push towards more EU integration.

Speaking with Euractiv on the margins of the youth summit hosted by the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) between 20-22 September, where delegates and MEPs discussed their party’s visions for the EU’s future, Italian MEP Carlo Fidanza argued that there needed to be a counter-narrative to the drive for more EU integration.

“This event came about as a reaction, if you will, to the Conference on the Future of Europe (COFEU),” Fidanza told Euractiv.

The COFEU was a one-year exercise in participatory democracy at the EU level, bringing together citizens and civil society representatives from across the bloc to discuss how to reform the EU. Its conclusions included recommendations to increase the EU’s competencies on cross-border health policy, scrap the need for unanimity on foreign policy decisions, and to re-open the EU treaties.

“When we realised that it was necessary to counterbalance a narrative that saw the process of European integration going in one direction only, that of more and more integration, which in our vision runs the risk of excessively penalising the member states and leading to an excessive devolution of powers from nation states toward Brussels, there arose the need to work with young people to try to give a different idea of a confederal Europe that does fewer things and does them better,” Fidanza told Euractiv.

Opinion polling suggests that the ECR’s member parties, including Fidanza’s Brothers of Italy, whose leader Giorgia Meloni heads the Italian government, are likely to make significant gains at next June’s European elections. That could, potentially, elevate the group to become the third largest faction in the European Parliament behind the centre-right European People’s Party (EPP) and the Socialists and Democrats, and has prompted speculation in recent months that future majorities in the next Parliament could see EPP and ECR alliances.

Fidanza argued that the gathering in Brussels was about promoting “a Europe in which national sovereignties are respected and in which we share some major competencies that we can do together, those that cannot be fully carried out as nation states”.

“But on the more everyday aspects of the lives of European citizens leave freedom under the principle of subsidiarity to the member states to be able to regulate as they see fit,” the Italian MEP added.

A stronger Europe

However, he dismissed the notion that this is a eurosceptic vision that seeks to attack the role of the EU institutions.

“We want a stronger Europe in the international geopolitical context and the competitiveness of European companies that must be defended and protected against global competition with China and the United States,” said Fidanza. He also pointed to the need to counter illegal immigration and protect the EU’s external borders as a case of where a “stronger Europe” was needed.

“So we are actually pro-Europeans, as opposed to those who instead handed us a weak Europe from a productive industrial point of view and only gave us a lot of rhetoric about ever-increasing integration that, however, did not then bring a stronger Europe.”

Fidanza also called for EU lawmakers to take a more pragmatic approach towards the green energy transition, contending that the last four years of Ursula von der Leyen’s European Commission have witnessed “a legislature that has been under the banner of a particularly green ideology that has actually hit the productive capacity of European companies very hard”.

“We are conservatives. Nature is what our fathers passed on to us and we will pass on to our children,” he said, adding that “we have a conservative idea of ecological transition, of man’s relationship with the environment”.

“It is crucial for these kids who have grown up with more environmental awareness than previous generations, but who are well aware that having a green desert is still a desert,” said Fidanza.

Fidanza also called for EU

INTERVIEW

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The future EU should focus on doing less but doing it better, leading conservatives concluded following a two-day summit of young delegates in Brussels. [Carlo Fidanza, P&G]
ECR Group Youth Summit 2023. For a conservative EU reform

From 20 – 22 September in the European Parliament, the first ECR Group Youth Summit took place. The summit brought together more than 130 young individuals from 12 EU Member States, who engaged in thought-provoking discussions, exchanged ideas and examined the future of Europe from a conservative perspective.

The European Conservatives and Reformists Group in the European Parliament is the only constructive non-federalist opposition force in the EU and has always been a strong supporter of the Union’s motto: United in diversity. At the core of the ECR Group Youth Summit was a commitment to a euro-realist vision for the EU’s future—a vision of a Union of sovereign nation states capable of doing less but doing it better. By providing a platform for young Europeans to express their thoughts and concerns, the summit fostered a pluralism of opinions and ideas, moving away from a one-size-fits-all approach to European integration.