



'Young Europeans, Let's take Care of the Planet!'



A European delegation of youth presenting the Charter of their responsibilities in Brussels

November 24, 2010

A delegation of young Europeans was in Brussels last November 24, to present the *Youth Charter of Responsibilities 'Let's Take Care of the Planet'*, that was jointly written by 350 young delegates during the International youth Conference in Brasilia, to **Mr. Van Rompuy**, President of the **European Council**, **Mr. Stahl**, General Secretary of the **Committee of the Regions**, **Mrs Plauborg**, private office member of the Commissioner Mrs Hedegaard (Climate Action) at the **European Commission**, **Mr. Van Ypersele**, Vice-President of the **IPCC**, and to **Andrés Tobias y Rubio**, from the **Environment unit of the European Union Council**. The objective of these visits was both to diffuse the Youth Charter and related process, and to present the European project of continuity. The presentation of the Charter by the youth themselves, at the highest level of the European Institutions, is one of the high points of this international process.

Delegation composition

The delegation was composed of **15 persons**:



- 5 delegates (14-16 years old): Stéphane Bordenet, *France*; Maria Faiola, *Italy*; Max Jochem, *Germany*; Konstantinos Palaiojanos, *Greece*; Silvia Viña López, *Spain*.
- 2 facilitators (24-25 years old): Ariadna Pomar, *Spain*; Moritz Rehfeld, *Germany*.
- 8 accompanying adults: the delegation ambassador, Pierre Calame, Chairman of the Charles Leopold Mayer Foundation; 3 teachers (Elettra Ercolino, *Italy*; Poly Ragou, *Greece*; Guillaume Saliège, *France*); a scientist and photographer, Giovanni Filocamo; a member of the European Mouvement, Charles Kleinerman; 2 organizers, Lydia Nicolle and Delphine Leroux-Astier, from Monde Pluriel NGO, *France*.

Global scenario

Each of these meetings roughly followed the same scenario. It proceeded about 1 hour, in the following way:

- Introduction by the delegation ambassador, Pierre Calame, to present the framework
- Synopsis of the activities' process from February to June 2010, at local, national, regional and international levels, by the German facilitator
- Film on June Brasilia International Youth Conference (activities, intercultural atmosphere, products)
- Reading of the International Youth Charter of responsibilities, by the delegates, youth accounts on their experience, and brief introduction on the continuity project, by the Spanish facilitator
- Open discussion

Visits proceeding

- **At the European Council with Mr. Herman Van Rompuy**

Mr. President spent almost one hour with the delegation, in spite of the Irish crisis, this is in itself a real political act whose importance shouldn't be underestimated.





The visit started with an introduction by Pierre Calame, Chairman of the Charles Leopold Mayer Foundation, followed by a presentation by the young delegates and facilitators of the youth Charter of responsibilities, the upstream activities from local to International level, and the continuity project at European level.

Reactions of Mr. President to the presentation:

"You are here because you have a feeling of common destiny... Responsibility is a key word on my view: you are always responsible for someone else or something else; for me responsibility is the same as solidarity: we feel responsible because we feel in solidarity with someone..."

In the 70's the report of the Club of Rome was really a shock; but after there was the economic crisis so ecology went into the background. We, as Europeans, are very involved on Climate Change. But after Copenhagen, the momentum was lost: lack of common values, lack of common destiny.

Life is always a mix of values and interest (for a job, a country etc.) which is legitimate. At the end, often interest is the winner. We started the EU with big ambition but interest has won. In negotiations on Climate change we can be intellectually convinced but it takes a long time; in Latin we call it *festina lente*: you need to hurry but slowly.

Please keep that part of idealism and inspiration!!!

The EU is in the lead on CC. We establish rules that the member states have to respect, this is a real legal target: it is unique in the world!

I will inform my colleagues about this charter.

We have to believe in mankind: never underestimate human energy, creativity : man is a dynamic creature !If there are pressure from NGO things can change. I am grateful that you were here!"

The question was raised on whether it would be possible to put the 2012 European Youth Conference on the agenda for the Council; M. Van Rompuy answered that we should stay in contact.

● At the Committee of the Regions –COR- , with Mr. Gerhard Stahl

Mr Stahl welcoming, along with Mr Essender, was very warm.

Reactions to the presentation:

Mr. Stahl: "I am really fascinated... we can see that what is behind this is your engagement. Keep your enthusiasm.

As Pierre Calame said in his introduction, **we do need common values**. And sometimes it is hard to put this in a common charter. Let's think of a follow up together, on how to help you, and about a strategy for Rio + 20."

Mr. Essender presented the Committee of the Regions (CR): in Brussels, there are 700 persons working in the offices. **Regions are key players at local level in the EU.**

The COR role is to tell the high institutions how important local actors are and at the same time to explain local actors how European legislation is important.

"I find the Charter a very interesting document, I admire you, that 53 countries have been able to agree on a Charter."

Pierre Calame described the fantastic ethical and methodological working quality in Brazil for the International Conference. **"Commitment is another way to live."**

Mr. Essender presented an essential initiative: the **Covenant of Mayors**: European mayors gathered and signed a Covenant¹ to commit themselves to sustainable energy; and recently the European Covenant of Mayors signed an agreement with its counterpart in the US this week. The COR is trying to push this cooperation. See <http://www.eumayors.eu/>

Mr. Stahl explained how the youth could use this covenant directly at their levels: **"You the youth can go and ask your mayors if they signed the covenant!"**

¹ The **Covenant of Mayors** is a commitment by signatory towns and cities to go beyond the objectives of EU energy policy in terms of reduction in CO₂ emissions through enhanced energy efficiency and cleaner energy production and use.



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Pierre Calame suggested several ways to cooperate: "Could you put the Global responsibility issue at the bottom of your agenda for a European Assembly, for Rio + 20² Summit? Can you send a call to all regions to participate this project and to a European Youth Conference? The COR could take the lead; we can launch a bottom-up process."

"This is a nice dream", said Mr. Stahl. He reminded the high institutions have their own commitments and interests, sometimes with fake agreements, sometimes building frontiers between countries instead of bridges. Along with Mr. Essender, they evoked several cooperation possibilities: by helping us finding new participants by diffusing the International Charter to European regions and local authorities; also why not gathering other mayors or regional decision-makers that participated to the project in 2010 to present it to other mayors in the COR? Mr Essender could also take part to next coordination meeting for the Youth project in Paris next February. The COR will organize a conference of the Regions and cities in Copenhagen, in spring 2012, to contribute to Rio + 20. There could be a good link with the youth action for Rio + 20 to bring your contribution for the conference of adults. Why not organizing a parallel Youth conference in Copenhagen and make bridges?



● At the Commission, with Mrs Mette Plauborg



Reaction on the Youth Charter:

"The world can be very proud to have you on board... you dare to stand up, to travel ... then I am confident that the world will change. ... I like you saying we must start local, at home, at your school. From there we have to change habits. The better we are on educating ourselves, the better we will achieve change...."

Mrs. Plauborg then evoked the complexity of the task when it is about satisfying all the parties when taking a decision relative to climate changes effects, given the interrelation between ecological, social issues, national economies... But there is optimism especially with the green jobs development, although the big challenge is also to change our behaviours.

"You all have mobile phones, computers ...; we will be 1 billion more 5.5 millions and everybody will need a mobile phone! (...) You children will be the one who will feel the more climate change: generation; there are new threats on human beings: then the has to come from you, form your parents, etc."



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Pierre Calame presented the different levels where the help of the European Commission on Climate Change would help to reinforce the Youth European continuity project: by disseminating the Charter, helping us to find a European Official institution as an inviting entity, providing some material support, calling other stakeholders, and especially conveying the project to other Commissions (Education and Culture in particular).

Mrs Plauborg gave many good advices that could help us but no decision can be taken at that stage.

In particular, on the follow-up:

She mentioned that the Commissioner Connie Hedegaard would be able to put her signature saying she is in favor of this project. She also advised us to write directly to Mrs Hedegaard with our concrete expectations, as well as to the Danish Minister on Climate and ask them how they could help us, she also gave us a direct contact to reach the Danish European Presidency team.

² 20th anniversary of Rio Earth Summit in May 2012 (international conference called Rio+20)



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- **At the European Union Council, with Andrés TOBIAS Y RUBIO, from the Environment unit**



Mr Tobias y Rubio made a speech on *the role of the EU Council in preserving the planet* and opened a discussion.

"Environment has always been present in the European Treaties; the EU has been on the lead regarding the environment (with Japan, Austria and Norway). It is not alone anymore: China is now very cooperative on environment because of suffering many natural catastrophes; Obama is also becoming more sensitive on the issue.

Copenhagen Conference was close to a failure, but the recent conference on Biodiversity in Nagoia, Japan, inspires more optimism.

The green growth appears to be an opportunity, since green jobs are in full expansion.

In the EU, the question of implementation is the weak point of our policies, while China says : "we don't sign up, but we do things" !

About Rio +20, two main topics are on the agenda: green economy and what International framework for a sustainable development (UNEP upgrading or creating a new organization)

Within the UE, we are a bit divided on that meeting and are therefore "cautiously optimistic".

Reaction on the Youth charter *Let's take Care of the Planet*:

Mr Tobias y Rubio finds the charter to be an excellent text, showing the youth awareness and strong commitment. He made a few remarks on the contents:

- On the taxes issues (on cars and air pollution): there is in fact no competence of the EU on that aspect, which remains a national prerogative.
- On the GMO: it is delicate to have such a critical position (Is there a French influence on that aspect?), since GMO also serve to fight against hunger, especially in some regions such as Africa, suffering from the climate changes effects and draughts. As for the nuclear issue, we cannot be all white or black...
- On the products boycott: in diplomatic terms, better to talk of embargo rather.

- **At the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change), with its Vice President, Mr Jean-Pascal Van Ipersele.**

The meeting took place at the University of Louvain-la Neuve, with part of the delegation (Moritz Rehfeld, Silvia Viña López, Stéphane Bordenet, Max Jochem; Charles Kleinerman, Delphine Leroux-Astier, Pierre Calame).

Jean-Pascal Van Ypersele is a physicist; he is at the science-policy interface; he was part of the Belgian delegation at the Earth Summit, in Rio 92. He was scientific adviser during the UN Conferences of the Parties (called "Cop").

The IPCC's role is to **give advice on the risks and to define the different options** on adaptation / mitigation of climate change to the policy makers, and on the advantages and cost of the different policies, but not to organize negotiations and make decisions. A bit like a doctor who could make a diagnosis on an ill person, but who could not give instructions.

So the position is very tricky: they have to set a series of scenario, but then there are always value-judgement involved: is it better to preserve the trees or the lumberjack work? Is it better to promote renewable energy or to have more nuclear power plants to cut down CO2 emissions?

About Copenhagen Conference (Cop 15), the media have created a mental climate presenting it as a failure. In fact a lot was made in Copenhagen, even if the progress is slow compared to the challenges. But the "2 degree target was adopted there, and this is a real turning point in the climate change fighting. Also, the European Council decided to provide 2,2 billion dollars to the southern countries to fight deforestation (20% of the global CO2 emissions).

During the discussion, Pierre Calame underlined the fact that **the feeling to belong to a global community is the only way to accept plucky political negotiations**. We therefore must create a feeling of common destiny, to overcome national considerations. Jean-Pascal Van Ypersele agreed on that. For him, **the idea of responsibility in Europe is a very delicate issue**, since Europeans countries fear this term for being related to the question of compensation / reparation of the pollution emitted by the industrialized countries. And they wouldn't take the risk to admit the idea of an "ecological debt".



Mr. Ypersele explained the importance of the **article 6 of the UNFCCC** - United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change - **of 1992**, as for the presence of young people during negotiation meetings such as Cancun this month. **Article 6 is indeed about awareness raising, participation of the civil society, and access to information.**

In particular, an international network of schools was created in this context, and many delegations participate to the conferences organized in the framework of the Conferences of the Parties (COP), among which a youth delegation. Also in each country, there is a focal person responsible for the implementation of this article. So the youth could use this article, in their countries to see how they could make links with this schools network and the different initiatives coming from this article 6.

Another interesting information for the youth: several procedures exist for them to participate to the IPCC meetings, as observers.

Reactions to the reading of the Charter by the delegates

The planet is ok; what is threatened is the living species!!!

The general framework is designed by policy-makers, whether we like it or not...

As for Rio+20: the IPCC will be present there because of the very issue.

Good advices and potential support for the Continuity project 2011-2012!

These visits in Brussels were a real success, not only for the diffusion of the youth International Charter *Let's take Care of the Planet*, the youth enthusiasm and pride, but also for the feeling of being Europeans and the image of our European institutions after these meetings, of the decision-makers and experts: these personalities from the highest European institutions and from the UN showed great interest on the youth commitment on Climate Changes issues, and on the continuity project to reinforce the youth will to face the big social and environmental challenges related to climate change. There was the key point: the delegation felt at the end of November 24th that they were not alone, that they might have support from important entities that could help a lot : the commission on Climate Action to diffuse the project to other commissions, the European Council to support morally the project and include 2012 European youth conference in its agenda, the Committee of the Regions to collaborate on the organization of a European youth conference in Copenhagen, in parallel to the regions and cities conference in view to all prepare Rio + 20, the IPCC to keep a link as scientific experts,...

The delegation is extremely thankful to the persons who welcomed the youth delegation in Brussels, and to Pierre Calame who made these meetings possible, and the youth strongly hopes this is a strong collective dynamics towards responsibility and commitment for the future of the planet, of human beings, of our coming generations.

By Lydia Nicollet and Delphine Leroux-Astier

Appendix:

- Powerpoint document showed during the meetings
- European continuity project, 1 page summary
- link to more photos : files.me.com/giovanni.filocamo/e0mq12
- Soon available: a film