

Opening ceremony speech

Dear Mr. Van der Elst, dear Mr. Sorensen, dear Justyna, dear participants and guests,



If today I had been asked to tell you the most fantastic story I have ever heard of, without any doubt, I would have told the story about the European Union. The story of centuries of hate ending up with a worldwide unique cooperation system. The story of rival states joining forces to fight for peace. A story of economical, political and military war leading to economical, political and military solidarity. Of course, the European community was founded on economical interests at first, starting with a free trading market and introducing our own currency as a result. But very soon, other questions began to appear, questions of a European nationality, of a European identity, a European culture.

French, Italian, Hungarian citizens began to ask themselves what values united them to Croatian, Spanish or English citizens. And the debates are still going on today, specialists from all around the world trying to define European identity. In fact, is there really such a common culture between the states of such a large continent, between the north and the south, the east and west? Very often, I try to think of an answer, and then take a look at organizations like AER. Not another national cooperation system, nor, a regional partnership between citizens, that is to say a link at a much more local level. So for me, the answer is clear, yes, we do have a lot to share and a common will to build our future together. And for me, such a will goes beyond the frontiers of the European Union, I'm thinking of our friends from Turkey, for example, being itself a central element when mentioning the future of Europe, as we all know. But that leads me to the next question: what future? What common direction do we want to take and who will be the decision maker tomorrow? The youth of today, of course.

The AER took that in consideration two years ago, as they decided to create a youth regional network, each meeting gathering more and more young people from more and more diverse regions of Europe. And as the first president of such a network, it is truly an honor for me today to be part of the jury of such an event, particularly significant for two reasons: first of all, of course, because it attracts participants between 14 and 18 years old, but more particularly because it enables all of these future European citizens to give their own definition of what Europe means for them.

As this competition was organized for the first time in 2008, the idea coming from the West Sussex Youth Cabinet, 36 regions from 11 countries participated, more than a 1000 participants thereby contributing to the big success of the first edition. Issues like democracy, peace, work, history, integration, culture and EU membership were raised through music, art, dance, drama, films and more. Therefore, on behalf of the Youth Regional Network, I would like to congratulate all the participants of this year's edition and, of course, our finalists present today in Brussels.

I wish you all good luck, and I now declare the Final of the Second edition of the "Do You Speak European?" contest open. Thank you all.

Charlotte Kudé, President of Youth Regional Network of AER

