

Aloys Rigaut

Distinguished guests, Dear liberal friends,

Why 65% of voters under 24 years old voted 'NO' to the Lisbon Treaty last year in Ireland? In other countries, we often see a high rate of abstention among young voters. However, polls also show a strong support among them for the EU. Hence this question: how is that possible?

I assume you all know the books "for dummies": Windows for dummies, Facebook for dummies... I even saw on ELDR's electoral website a "Dummies guide to Election". Well, maybe we should think about a "Dummies guide to Abstention"!

What is the recipe to abstention at EP elections? Very simple:

First ingredient: make things very complex. Use a lot of EU jargon: *acquis communautaire*, co-decision, democratic deficit, EU directive, subsidiarity... Have a President that changes every 6 months so that nobody can remember anymore if the current president is Nicolas Sarkozy or Vaclav Klaus. Create institutions with similar names: Council of Ministers, Council of Europe, European Council... Have the Parliament change city all the time, so that we don't know if it is located in Brussels or Strasbourg. And avoid having a real government, based on a parliamentary coalition and a clear programme.

Second ingredient: bore citizens, campaign on issues that have absolutely NO relevance at all for their everyday life. For instance campaign on institutional issues! Who cares indeed if the EU has one or three pillars? Who has ever read the Lisbon Treaty from A to Z? Who knows the succession of treaties, from Rome to Nice, passing by Brussels, Luxembourg, Maastricht or Amsterdam?

Last ingredient: talk about issues on which everyone agrees: peace in Europe, the fall of the Berlin Wall, Barack Obama, competitiveness, climate change... Create consensus on all issues. Avoid disagreement, so that citizens cannot see the difference any more between political parties. Talk about 'Brussels', and avoid mentioning partisan positions. And very important: tell them that if they vote against this consensus they are against Europe and should be ashamed.

Seriously, this is not the Europe that we want, and this is not how you will motivate young voters to go voting!

What we want during this campaign are three things:

First: a real competition between conservatives, liberals and socialists. Political parties that dare to play their role. Political parties that fight against each other, put forward their ideas, debate, and disagree - yes, disagree! How do you indeed want that citizens get interested to vote if they see that everyone agrees and that their vote will thus not change anything?

Second: that we campaign on concrete European issues. Take higher education: how is it possible that we have so few Universities in the world's top-50? Take mobility: why is it that we still cannot take a simple mobile phone or energy services subscription in

another EU country? Take budget priorities: how is it possible that we are still spending more than 40% of our budget on agriculture when today's priorities should be on energy, environment, or innovation? For example: every day the EU spends €2 per cow but only 7 eurocents per student, is that normal? Citizens are tired of the same blah-blah; they want reality politics.

And third: clear faces to embody our ideas. I mean: liberal candidates for key EU positions. LYMEC was not successful in getting a liberal candidate for the Commission Presidency, but we are happy that we have at least a liberal candidate for the Parliament presidency. Graham, thanks for heralding our ideas and all the best for your campaign!

I want also to address a word to Annemie: the campaign has now started, and you can count on us, the European liberal youth, LYMEC, to fight alongside with you. We have many young candidates throughout Europe that will join forces. And we will make sure that the voice of the youth is listened to.

Let me know conclude by an unconventional quote. George W. Bush was once quoted saying: "It's exciting; I don't know whether I'm going to win or not. I think I am. I do know I'm ready for the job. And, if not, that's just the way it goes".

It is true that it is exciting, but one thing is sure: we are ready for the job. We have the leaders, and we have the ideas. Whether socialists like it or not, that's just the way it goes!

Thank you for your attention.