



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT TO CAMPUS PROGRAMME

Mariela Baeva

Former Member of the European Parliament,

Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee

Report 2017

For a number of years now, I have wholeheartedly joined the EP to Campus Programme largely due to its main objective to continue delivering expertise that builds the students' knowledge capital.

The process enjoys reciprocity – as guest speakers, we benefit from the analytical approach and critical thinking of the young generation.

This year, I started to Mendel University in Brno, Czech Republic, with an extra idea discussed well in advance with the Jean Monnet Chair in European Economic Studies at the university, Prof. Lubor Lacina. The idea was related to a small creative project targeting solidarity among the international group of students I was invited to speak to with the cause of the most disadvantaged groups of people globally: refugees and migrants. I elaborate more on the creative project at the end of this report. My personal belief is that we have to add further value every year we, as guest speakers, meet students and get them involved in discussing European and international issues.

This year, during the week covering the period between December 4 and 8, we focused on *EU Migration Insights 2017* and *The role of the EP in the UK's withdrawal from the EU*.

The first lecture shed light on the unprecedented global movement of people. We discussed the issue in terms of current EU data, figures and migrant integration public policies of the MSs. We also approached migration from the perspective of identity and populism through referring to two surveys. I briefly commented on the reform of the Dublin system and the EU return policy.

As concerns over migration and identity are central to European politics, we devoted generous time to discuss two surveys covering two opposite aspects of the issue.

The one of the London-based Royal Institute of International Affairs, known as Chatham House, is designed to probe the attitudes in the EU towards the perceived effects of migration, the refugee crisis and how it has been managed since 2015. The specific issue of Islam in European societies is also in the focus of the survey.

The second survey is produced by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), based in Vienna, and it throws light on the experiences of Muslim refugees and their children born in EU MSs.

We could make two general conclusions:

*Populist movements will continue to find resonance among the public when they seek to amplify such concerns into a broader opposition towards the EU. So, wide-ranging strategies will be necessary to engage more authoritarian-minded voters and to re-frame debates about migration in such a way as to reduce perceptions of a cultural or identity threat.

*Over the longer term, the leadership of the EU institutions, civil society and business will need to invest efforts and goodwill in attempting to change attitudes. A source of optimism, however, is stemming from the EU's advantages compared to those of other parts of the globe – not only that some of the EU MSs economies are among the most competitive in the world, but they also enjoy some of the most equal societies. The challenge for the EU is to utilize these strengths and to build on the historic achievements of integration.

To bring the international group of around 60 students closer together, I mentioned an initiative of last September. The refugee solidarity concert series Give a Home took place in cities all over the world. The English singer-songwriter Ed Sheeran joined, too, a lineup of 1,000 artists performing at the places of their music fans in support for the cause of the refugees: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UTxa6HTIecw>

The second topic concerning *The Role of the EP in the UK's withdrawal from the EU* provoked many questions under the mantra "Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed". We discussed in detail the citizens' rights, Good Friday Agreement and single financial settlement. We had a brainstorming session based on the public opinion in the post-Brexit era.

Our Friday session had its peak: we managed to embark on a small creative project. Students from Syria, Ghana, Croatia, Ukraine, Czech Republic came together to call for empathy in a song titled *Race to Freedom*. I wrote the lyrics; a British composer, integrated into the project by Prof. Lacina, wrote the music, and the audiovisual unit at the university made the video. We dedicated our mutual project to 18 December, International Migrants Day and 20 June, World Refugee Day: <https://youtu.be/XLti17OV8R4>

