Young people building bridges between the EU and Moldova

On the road with the Young European Ambassadors
Energetic, enthusiastic, full of impressions, eager to share their European experiences and motivate others to follow their path: this is what stands out from the Young European Ambassadors who have been touring Moldova to speak with their peers and encourage them to benefit from the educational, cultural and financial opportunities offered by the European Union.

Text by Mariana Tabuncic

When it comes to getting a message across, direct human contact has always been the most effective form of communication. Armed with this conviction, a group of Young European Ambassadors, from Moldova and from EU member states, took up the challenge of crossing the country from north to south and east to west, speaking with school and university students about the European Union and the values it promotes, but also about the study opportunities it provides to the new generation.

The European Ambassadors’ journey started on 8 November and continued until 2 December 2016, taking them to meet young people from over 30 educational institutions in the country. The ambassadors travelled to Hânceşti, Anenii Noi, Orhei, Şoldăneşti, Călăraşi, Străşeni, Chişinău, Cahul, Taraclia and other localities, with the idea to build bridges and create connections between Moldovan and EU youth, to encourage them take advantage of the possibilities offered to school and university students eager to explore new horizons and acquire the knowledge and experience that will help them in the future.
Respect and admiration

“Hello. My name is Sophie and I am from Belgium.” With these words spoken in Romanian, the coordinator of the Young European Ambassadors network, Sophie Vériter opened her interaction with the students, drawing sincere applause from the audience, who appreciated her respect for our country. Sophie studied law in Spain, and then returned to Belgium. Her interest in the EU’s Neighborhood Policy was the first step in a journey that had now brought her to Moldova with the Young European Ambassadors network.

From their discussions with the visiting Ambassadors, Moldovan students found out about the education opportunities offered by the EU, about academic exchange programmes such as Erasmus+, but also about the possibilities for volunteering in EU countries, a hugely valuable experience in the community.

The discussions took place in both Romanian and English, an opportunity for the students to apply their knowledge of English. In a relaxed and informal atmosphere, without commitments or obligations, the Young Ambassadors shared their experiences, exchanged ideas, discussed EU culture and values, volunteering and educational opportunities in European countries, as well as the future that young Moldovans can have by accessing various European projects.

Information at first hand

The importance of such contacts derives from the fact that the information the students get comes at first hand, and enthusiasm and experience of the Young Ambassadors is infectious, inspiring the students into following their path.

“One year ago, I was working in France,” says Daniel Cojocari, a Young European Ambassador from Moldova. “But don’t get delusions; I was working on a construction site, like so many young people, thinking it was enough to work in construction and make good money. I can tell you from my own experience that money doesn’t bring the greatest happiness. Even if you make the money you’ve been dreaming about, you realise in the end that you don’t have time to spend it. Through my story, I’d like to motivate you to choose another path in your lives. I decided to come home and continue my studies. In parallel, I started working in a youth organisation; I do volunteering and apply for various European projects. Thanks to them, I travel through Europe more than when I had money. Now, I travel more, develop my skills, meet new people, learn new things…”

While a student in Dublin, Ireland, Paula Avril Jatariu from Romania got involved in a variety of peace and volunteering projects, visited many countries and met other nationalities both from inside and outside Europe, all of which offered her the chance to broaden her horizons and grow as a personality. “Take advantage of each chance offered to you by life,” she urged the young people attending the discussions.

For Carolina Cicati, student at the Lyceum of the Academy of Sciences of Moldova, the experience of being a Young Ambassador was preceded by a series of activities and opportunities offered by the EU that she tried not to miss.
“All this has helped me now to be sitting in front of you, and it is a pleasure to meet so many students motivated to make a change at home, in the Republic of Moldova,” Carolina says.

Apply and get experience

After having “broken the ice” through various interactive games about the EU, after having talked about the history of the European Union and the programmes offered, the Young Ambassadors encouraged their peers to apply for as many European projects as possible. “Since 2014, I have been involved in ten projects, participating in various events held in Italy, France, Germany and other countries. At the beginning, you shouldn’t be afraid to apply. Even if you don’t win, you get an extremely valuable experience for the future,” assured Sveatoslav Beglița, another Young European Ambassador from Moldova.

The Young Ambassadors encouraged their peers so that they in turn could become ambassadors of European culture and values, because things can change only through personal involvement. “If I have come from building sites to become a Young European Ambassador, then you surely have this opportunity as well,” Daniel Cojocari told the audience.

The Ambassadors urged the students to take advantage of all the opportunities and to acquire experience everywhere in the world, stressing at the same time the importance of building a European future at home, in Moldova. The lively discussions went well beyond their allotted time, evidence of the students’ interest – and all were keen to stay in touch and make maximum use of the opportunities coming their way.

Project competition for creative solutions

One aspect of the Ambassadors’ campaign is to support students in developing community projects that would answer the question “If you received a grant from the EU, what would you do to improve the life in your community?” The youngsters were encouraged to work in teams and find solutions to the
problems in their own communities. The best projects will be awarded prizes by the Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Moldova.

Daniel Țâcu, a student at the Măgdăcești Theoretical Lyceum, was enthusiastic about the meeting with the Young Ambassadors: “The discussions once again convinced me that I must be bolder, study English and participate in as many extra-curriculum activities as possible to develop my skills and abilities. In this way, we will also manage to solve certain problems in our school,” Daniel said confidently.

Student Maria Furtună believes cooperation with the EU offers young people the chance to benefit from numerous learning possibilities. “This training is welcome because many young people want to get involved in developing and implementing projects but they do not know what to do and how. I have learned very much from this seminar. The most important thing is that I became brave to apply for many projects. I realised that only by getting involved can we contribute to developing our communities,” Maria says.

It is enough to spend a day around these young people to get ‘infected’ with their energy, desire to change things and take advantage of the opportunities offered by the EU. It is certain that by investing today in the youth, in their desire to learn, to get involved and change the situation at the local level, we are investing in the future of Moldova.

The visits of the Young European Ambassadors to schools and universities in the country were organised jointly by the Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Moldova and the EU regional project “EU NEIGHBOURS east” as part of the awareness-raising campaign “Europe for You,” in cooperation with the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Moldova.

EU Neighbours East

Young European Neighbours Network