



Youth, protest and the fight for social rights in Europe – A view from Spain and France

12 October 2026, 17:45-20:00

@ Kamilou - Rue Joseph II 36, 1000 Bruxelles

Description

Barricaded lycées in France, tents across Madrid's Puerta del Sol. In recent weeks, hundreds of thousands have taken to the streets in two of Europe's largest democracies. French pupils are demanding decent schools with enough teachers and safe buildings and classrooms in which they can learn. In Spain, people are protesting a housing crisis that has priced a generation out of independent life. Both mobilisations come at a politically charged moment for both countries, as the far right climbs in the polls and increasingly sets the terms of public debate, eroding democratic standards along the way.

Behind these protests lies a bigger question: what happens after the tents come down? Too often, the energy of mass protest struggles to outlast the moment. Often, people care deeply about politics, but the parties, unions and associations that once turned anger into lasting change are growing weaker. So how can today's protests deliver real change on affordable housing, good public schools and other social rights that shape everyday life?

This panel discussion looks at that question through the lens of youth politics. France's school protests are driven almost entirely by 15- to 18-year-olds. In Spain, young people are a strong presence on the streets and squares, marching alongside tenants' unions, trade unions and older generations hit by the same crisis. But these are not only French or Spanish stories. Pupils in Liège have already followed their French peers, and unaffordable housing and underfunded public services are shaping young people's lives from Dublin to Athens. What role can youth movements and progressive youth organisations across Europe play in turning this energy for a more social Europe into something that lasts?

About the speakers

Emma Rafowicz is a Member of the European Parliament from France, sitting with the S&D Group, where she is Vice-Chair of the Committee on Culture and Education and a member of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality. Former President of the Young Socialist Movement in France, she was elected to the European Parliament in 2024 and previously served as a municipal councillor in Paris.

Mariam Asghari is Secretary General of the Young European Socialists (YES), the youth organisation of the Party of European Socialists. A long-standing activist in Sweden's Social Democratic Youth League (SSU), where she served on the national board, she has also been a Vice-President of the International Union of Socialist Youth (IUSY).

Javier Carbonell is the director of the progressive ThinkTank Future Policy Lab and a Policy Analyst at the European Policy Centre (EPC). His research focuses on inequality, nationalism the far right and youth policy, and he has taught at Sciences Po Paris and Pompeu Fabra University. He writes regularly for El País.



Preliminary agenda

17:30 – 18:00

Registrations

18:00 – 18:10

Opening remarks

Christian Salm, Head of Democracy Programmes, FEPS

Tobias Mörschel, Director EU Office, Friedrich Ebert Foundation

18:10 – 19:10

A conversation on youth, protest and lasting change

Emma Rafowicz, S&D Member of the European Parliament

Mariam Asghari, Secretary General, Young European Socialists

Javier Carbonell, Director, Future Policy Lab

Moderation: Matteo Dressler, Policy Analyst for Democracy and Participation, FEPS

19:10 – 19:30

Question and Answers: Discussion with the audience

19:30 – 20:00

Reception

Food and drinks

The project that this event is part of is led by the Foundation for European Progressive Studies in cooperation with Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

