

ELF Pre Congress Seminar on Social Media, Vilnius 2018 Long Report (588 words)

ELF's Seminar on Campaigning on Social Media in Vilnius, Lithuania, brought together young liberals across Europe. The Seminar started with a tour of European Parliament and was followed by seminars examining social media secrets from looking at theory, best practice, and what we can learn from populist communications strategies. The event sought to build up online communicational capacity within LYMEC's Member Organisations and to equip them with the skills and up to date knowledge needed to campaign on social media effectively in the future.

Edgaras Mascinskas, LYMEC, was able to teach delegates the POST method of campaigning, examining the audience (people), objectives, strategy and technology used for different communications. This examined the Trump Election Campaign and tackled the conservatism towards social media as being a "fad". His talk examined how Instagram is becoming the future of political campaigning and should become a focus of young liberals wishing to campaign online. It led to a very active and engaged question and answer session where young liberals engaged with communication were able to share best practice and their visions for the future of online campaigning

This was followed by a presentation by Giorgia Bozzini, who spoke about how ELF can bring added value to Member Organisations - engaging with top academics, politicians and influencers to create an enhanced multiplier effect. This was followed by an evening dinner, where delegates were given an opportunity to network with like-minded young liberals.

On the Friday morning, Julis' Florian Philipp Ott was presented a seminar on Julis' use of Gamification to political campaign. They presented gamification as a theory tried and tested in the commercial world and shared the story of how Julis and FDP developed their own gamified campaigning app. This both examined the strengths, such as the higher activist engagement during a time that FDP had lower HR resources ; and the weaknesses, such as bugs, glitches, and the considerable expense of the project. The seminar then asked participants to come up with their own solutions for both rural and urban gamified campaigns - young liberals responded by coming up with high and low tech solutions.

Agne Belickaite spoke about what we can learn from Populist communication strategies, explaining that Liberals prioritise defending minorities from conformity, whereas populists speak for the many not the few, and as a consequence it should be the focus of Liberals to influence the majority to side with them. Agnes highlighted the importance for liberals to find emotional arguments and to speak with simple language with clear messages opposed to overcomplicated academic language. Liberals, Agnes says, need to inject charisma, pride, and optimism into their campaigning rather than focusing on the flaws of others - criticising other small parties can just prioritise their role as a major political agent (eg Clegg vs. Farage debate).

Finally the seminar was closed by LYMEC President, Svenja Hahn, who summarised the previous speakers and spoke of the importance of young liberals pioneering social media in the upcoming elections instead of constantly catching up with competitors. Lunch then followed.

Overall, the Seminar was able to present an opportunity for young liberals across Europe to learn the latest theory and practice of social media and online campaigning, it gave a platform to discuss the strengths and weaknesses in different online practices and projects and ideas for the direction of online campaigning. Finally it gave young liberals engaged with online communications the ability to network and build lasting friendships that we hope will allow for a continued flow and exchange of ideas beyond this seminar alone.