

Fear of the Future – Event Report

Instead of being convinced that our best days are behind us, we should focus our efforts on exploring the possibility of tomorrow.

This key conclusion, articulated by speakers during the launch of ELF's Fear of the Future publication, captured the essence of the discussions that took place. Held in Brussels on 28 January 2020, the morning event covered topics ranging from the question of European leadership, the media's role in perpetuating pessimism, and the dichotomy between societal progress and looming societal challenges.

Speakers included Fredrick Federley MEP; Dominik Kirchdorfer, Founder of the European Future Forum; Dragoş Pîslaru MEP; and Mathias Sundin, Co-founder and Executive Chairman of the Warp Institute, all of whom addressed an audience of approximately 40 people. Moderating the discussion was Lauren Mason, Project Officer at ELF, while the welcome and introduction speeches were given by Airis Meier, ELF Board Member, and Elias Rosell, Editor of the Fear of the Future publication, respectively.

In her opening remarks, Airis Meier called upon participants to consider the view that "fear of the future is essentially fear of the unknown". In the 21st century, "there has never been so much information available. We have never had it better – and yet, people are anxious," she continued. Elaborating on this point, Elias Rosell observed that people nowadays are living longer, are more educated, and are healthier than ever before, asking participants if they could realistically form a sincere response to the question: "is there really any other time you would prefer to live in?"

As contributors to the publication, Mathias Sundin and Dominik Kirchdorfer took to the stage to summarise the chapters they had individually authored, before later joining the other speakers for a panel discussion moderated by Lauren Mason.

The speakers were united in the belief that a people-oriented approach would be crucial to changing perceptions of the future. "If you think the world is getting gradually worse, what will convince you that it's getting better?" Mathias Sundin asked, highlighting the need for a positive global vision or project that would be effective in inspiring people. In search of an illustrative example, Frederick Federley MEP pointed to the Apollo 11 moon landing mission, citing its significance as an event that instilled worldwide hope and ambition. Turning his attention to the future, Federley stated that a focus on education would be a pre-requisite for securing prosperity for young generations.

Dominik Kirchdorfer asserted that more needs to be done to challenge the media's often skewed representation of events, commenting on how newspapers tend to push negative stories to the foreground at the expense of more positive ones. This belief was echoed by Dragoş Pîslaru MEP, who noted that when it comes to political strategies, "fear is more effective than idealism".

Ultimately, it was agreed that going forward, efforts should be made to see the opportunity inherent within the challenges that lie ahead, and to take active measures to rally people behind a collective vision of optimism.