

General Debate - Speech Ms. Sandrine De Crom, Belgium, **Young MP**
Dear Colleagues,

Belgium is facing the challenge of how we can engage youngsters in parliamentary democracy, just like all countries present here today.

What can we do to make young citizens aware of the importance of democracy and the rule of law before they lose their interest or pull out?

How do we connect their reality to parliament?

The Belgian parliaments deliver quite some efforts.

We welcome school classes on a daily basis.

We organize parliamentary simulations for youngsters a few times a year. During these simulations they can debate themselves, they have to find a majority for a compromise, they have to answer to questions of journalists, etc.

We also have a program called "Reporters for democracy". Youngsters prepare an interview with a real MP in class before they actually interview the MP in Parliament. After the interview, they edit their footage together with professionals. This program appeals a lot more to youngsters than a classic guided tour.

Despite initiatives like these, the most important information channel for youngsters, the digital world, remains largely uncultivated land in most parliaments, who only have a website with institutional information to offer. What we need is a multichannel comprehensive digital strategy or young people will not hear what we have to say.

Last but not least, I want to end with quoting Mahatma Gandhi: Be the change you want to see in the world. If you want to see more young people in your Parliament, if you want to see more women in your Parliament; VOTE FOR THEM!

Thank you for your attention.