

Discussing the UN Youth Delegates Program in Romania



One important form of youth participation at the UN level is through the **UN Youth Delegates Program**.

In Romania, it started back in 2006 when the first two UN Youth delegates have been selected to be part of negotiations and resolutions concerning youth and youth policies. Since then, every year, two representatives of Romania attend both the General Assembly and the Commission for Social Development, participate in intergovernmental discussions and meetings, conduct various research projects and are actively involved in numerous activities held by the Civil Society (CS) community in Romania and abroad, the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the Ministry of Youth and Sports and the UN Information Center.

Interviewing **Mr Dragoş PREDA**, the initiator and co-organizer of many social, cultural and education projects, pro-actively involved in the civil society and public-private environment in Romania. Among his best known projects, we mention the ongoing Forum of Education, the Classic is Fantastic Gala, the

Romanian book library in Turin and



Founder of CRREDAE, as well as of the Club for Romania, Dragoș stays very much attached to the project/ the organization (with which all began): the League of Romanian Students Abroad (Liga Studenților Români din Străinătate- LSRS).

For the second time returned to Romania after getting the French Government scholarship to the French National School of Administration (ENA) and graduating from Paris 1 Pantheon-Sorbonne University (Master 2) , Dragoș has continued his activity in numerous civil society organizations, participating as co-organizer and/ or member of the jury of several events such as the UN Youth Delegate Programme in Romania, Education Awards Gala, Civil Society Gala, and many others.

Alexandra: How did the UN Youth Delegate program start in Romania back in 2006?

Dragoș: Of course, the roots of the programme can be found within the United Nations, where luckily, a Lady of the Romanian diplomacy, Her Excellency Simona Mirela MICULESCU, Ambassador of Romania to the United Nations, truly committed herself to this country, to its future (namely, to *the youth*), backing each step further with her whole energy.

But every story has different perspectives. Mine started during the second year of the UN Youth Delegate program, back

in 2007. That year, I graduated from university in France and after getting my BA and MA degrees, I was looking to readapt to my home country. I found out about the program from a friend and I gave it a try. Not too many people know this inner story: I was not selected as I had no current involvement on the Romanian youth agenda and I was too recently returned from abroad to be the one representing the Romanian youth interests to the UN agora. Meantime, until 2009, I have been working for the Romanian Ministry of National Defence.

But, hazard took me closer to this program on the 8th of January 2009 when, together with some friends, I started a dream project that soon became a reality: *The League of Romanian Students Abroad* or [LSRS](#) . That dream gave me the opportunity to meet all the youth NGOs in Romania, among them, the Romanian Youth Council (CTR). At that time, CTR was trying to implement the program Un Youth Delegates in collaboration with the Romanian Ministry of Youth and Sports and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Back then, I had the pleasure to meet Mr. Octavian BELLU, the State Secretary for Sports at the Minister of Youth and Sports. Mr. BELLU took this program into consideration and put it on the discussions agenda with the Minister at that time, Ms RITZI.

In addition to this, it is worth to mention that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was supporting and legitimating the program as well. I am thinking about the tremendous support for this program provided by His Excellency, Ambassador Cosmin BOIANGIU, at that time Director General of the Direction for the United Nations; in a nutshell, after all these pieces have been put together, the only one thing we had to do was to organize the new officially reinforced UN Youth Delegates program in Romania.

In 2014, I was appointed chief of staff of the Romanian Minister of Youth and Sports (Ms Gabriela SZABO), which I am

still honored to be. This position gives me much more responsibility towards the program and towards my fellow colleagues from the civil society representing youth. While trying to improve it year by year, I thought about attaching it to the newly launched *National Youth Strategy 2014 – 2020* (strategy built up by my colleagues from the Department of Youth, under the direction of Mr. Cristian COSMIN, Secretary of State for Youth and his team, with the entire help and expertise of Romanian UNICEF branch, under the direction of Ms Sandie BLANCHET).

Doing this, together with my fellow colleagues from the Direction of International Affairs, we sent protocols of collaboration to the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as, for the first time, to UNICEF, OIF, in order to get them involved not only in the evaluation of the candidates, but also in building up their expertise through internships in these institutions.

Alexandra: The selection process for the program is organized by the Romanian National Youth Council and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs together with the Ministry of Youth and Sports. Who are the Romanian UN Youth Delegates? Can you provide us with a general profile picture of the delegates in terms of professional and academic qualifications and personal motivation?

Dragoș: The selection of the candidates, as well as the organization of the program is done by the Ministry of Youth and Sports, through the International Affairs Directorate. Currently, the Romanian National Youth Council is one of the observing members from the youth civil society.

The Romanian MFA plays an important role in the whole program, both from the expertise side providing support on the jury process, in teaching the UN Youth Delegates the UN ways of conduct, in providing know-how, and also in helping the delegates *sur-place*, logistically in New York, during the two

sessions.

Of course, the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs is one of the two main institutional stakeholders of the program.

Usually, the two UN Youth Delegates are a young lady and a young gentleman, based on equity between men and women. Moreover, they might be pupils or students between 18 and 25 years old. Furthermore, they are responsible young citizens of their country, very much involved in the youth civil community with a good academic background and a serious and energizing experience in matters touching their generation, advocating for a comprehensive vision of our society.

Alexandra: How would you evaluate the quality of the applications received every year and afterwards, the overall activity of the UN youth delegates in Romania?



Dragoş: Every year, I noticed improvement in the program *per se* and the involvement of the UN youth delegates in numerous youth-related issues. I hereby want to thank the previous UN Youth delegates, Mr Cosmin CHIRITA and Ms Eliza CHIRILA for their impressive involvement in advocating this program all over Romania, in creating awareness of the necessity of youth part-taking in the process of drawing the future of our country. Through their actions (i.e. their caravan in the country which took place between the two UN General Assembly

sessions), and afterwards, while connecting the dots and the youth hubs from Romania, they managed to foster the image of the program among young potential candidates to this program.

Alexandra: In New-York, the selected delegates from all countries involved in the program deliver a statement and participate in informal negotiations and discussions concerning youth. What is the impact of their statements at a national level? Or in other words, how does the statement reflect the ongoing activities of the delegates through their mandates?

Dragoș: I think that the New York UN arena is the right place for creating a common language, understanding and vision for our youth representatives.

The main “battle” goes home: the “battle” of their generation. Their deeds are seen after their mandate, if they pursue their goals. They are an interesting link at multiple levels: between generations, between the more opened civil society strata and the rigid public bureaucratic system, between Romania and the entire world. They are the creators of a common understanding more than a simple agenda, they are the ones creating communication bridges between the above mentioned categories.

For the first time, during the UN General Assembly session, the newly elected delegates raised the importance of sports in the development of the future generations; therefore, for the first time, the two sides of the Ministry were linked at the UN. They stood up for the importance of developing a preemptive health system, but also for creating a cohesion in the society and between cultures, a vehicle to end conflict, and rebuild countries. Last , but not least, sports create models to follow in the future. However, sports without youth don't exist.

The Romanian youth start to mean something, to be heard out by

the authorities, they start to build up awareness.

It takes time to change generations, but the first steps have been already taken. All it takes is to choose the best path and start walking on it.

Alexandra: It can be presumed that former UN youth delegates share common values and principles, professional objectives and interests. To what extent do former and current UN youth delegates act as a network? After finishing their mandates, do they enjoy a certain degree of influence on the wider public (political and civic level) promoting youth policies or questioning issues concerning youth?

Dragoş: For every generation of UN Youth delegates, further steps have been taken. Of course, an important element is each one's character, their will, the drive they have, how wide is their comfort zone, how visionary is their determinacy.

For the moment, their community is not truly forged, I would say that they become more united only "against dangerous situations" when, for example, the quality of the program is concerned. The European education system does not create the truly alumni network we might expect, and even if they remain more or less attached to the network and to the program, life takes them to much more individualistic careers and less advocating and involvement. So their influence is very much linked to their personality and their interest in pursuing the mandate they had and less on a real community building vision.

Alexandra: What are in your perspective the tools to enhance a better performance in terms of efficiency, activities and results of the program in Romania?

Dragoş: The best tool is the will: the will of their generation, the drive of the delegate themselves to conquer each and every obstacle, to surpass their beliefs and the previous generations, the difficulties and inertia of the system.

The second element, after the will of each stakeholder, should be a better and more clear financing process of the program. When we think about the material resources, we should perceive them as *moyens-en-soi* and not as *but-en-soi* (*fins*). We are the aspiration of ourselves and of the future generations, not the artifacts we built-up for our needs.

Moreover, I'm thinking about the importance of developing the network and create better connections between our delegates and various other programs, such as those developed by UNICEF, the UN Alliance of Civilizations chapter Romania, the MUNS (model of United Nations) programs, and UE Assembly simulations for youth. We might also consider opening international relations, political, security and defense think-tanks agendas to youth. In a nutshell, it is tremendously important to connect the dots of our society!

Alexandra: What are the main priorities of the current mandate of the Romanian UN Youth Delegates? And to what extent do they enjoy institutional support from governmental and non-governmental bodies?

Dragoş: For the 2014 – 2015 mandate, the new delegates are Ms Bianca DRAGOMIR and Mr Luca CIUBOTARU, selected after the selection process conducted in August 2014. They have already conducted consultations with youth representatives from Bucharest and other cities in Romania and organized various events on youth issues and campaigns to promote the values of the United Nations.



The aims of United Nations Youth Delegate program are:

- To directly involve the Romanian young people on drawing the international policy agenda on youth;

- To develop a sustainable society thru democratic values by facilitating youth participation on all decision-making levels;
- To promote youth policies, policy coordination mechanisms among young Romanians at national level as well as the importance of youth programs as part of the socio-economic development;
- To familiarize young people in Romania with global development issues and opportunities for involvement they have in this regard;
- To support activities and youth initiatives in Romania.

The types of activities initiated by the two youth delegates include:

- National activities aiming to increase awareness among young people in Romania on global issues and promote UN values;
- Seminars/ trainings/ workshops on the topic of sustainable development in Romania in the context of globalization;
- Debates/ conferences on UN specific topics;
- Publication of articles/ organization of challenging debates on specific topics regarding youth issues at a global level.

The two delegates also participate in a series of activities in order to actively promote both locally and nation-wide the priorities and as the values of the United Nations Program. Thus, the youth delegates participate in a range of activities, such as conferences, debates, roundtables, youth events promoting active citizenship, volunteering, non-formal education, leadership, human rights; as well as seminars, trainings schools, thematic forums, youth summits etc. on sustainable development issues and constantly touching the role of Romania in the context of globalization.

At international level, Romania's Youth Delegates in-office

attend two intergovernmental conferences: the United Nations General Assembly (in October) and the Commission for Social Development (in February, the following year).

Nowadays, despite the fact that the program was very well promoted by our previous delegates, from my point of view, we should struggle more in order to develop the UN Youth Delegate culture in Romania

Alexandra: How would you encourage young people to apply for this program? Do you have a message for those who might consider it in the future?

Dragoș: I will start by discouraging them! □ First, they will have to challenge their will and ask themselves if they have what it takes: not only the knowledge, the skills, the aptitudes, not only the will, the drive, the energy to surpass any obstacles, challenge new experiences, taste new flavors of human understanding, jump in an almost unknown before world with a thirst to discover! Only after that they will truly be able to open up the door to the wonderful and complex world of diplomacy! From that moment, their life should be about the others, about building, developing, reveling new perspectives of human thriving.

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Who are the UN Youth Delegates? In order to find out more about their profile, former and current activities, we discussed with several UN Youth Delegates who gave us their perspective over the program they have been part of for one year, back in the days.

(Reportage by Alexandra TIMOFTE)

For Ms Alexandra MARTIN, former UN Youth Delegate in 2008/2009, it was by far one of the most challenging, exciting

and enriching period of my life until now. I was only 19 when I found myself living my dream, but also experiencing the world from a different perspective. Together with Bogdan Covaliu, we aimed to craft a mandate that would reconcile the national perspectives on youth, be they expressed by national governmental stakeholders, NGOs or individuals and bridge the gap between the diplomatic interplay and grass root realities.



With a great support from H.E Simona Miculescu, the Romanian Permanent Representative of Romania to UN and her team based in New York, we managed to get our message across at the highest degree. We have worked together with the youth representatives from other countries to emphasize the importance of involving us, the youth, in the conversation and decision making process when it comes to our own future and development.

After finishing my mandate, I have been working in the Romanian Non-Governmental sector, in the field of education and human rights. In 2012, I have been deployed as a civilian expert, seconded by the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Georgia. Initially, I served as a human security monitor and after as Operations Officer of the European Union Monitoring Mission, Field Office Zugdidi.

At this moment, I returned to academia, enrolled in a MA program at Johns Hopkins University, School of Advanced International Studies, specializing in International Economics and Conflict Management, with a particular focus on the transition from traditional peacekeeping to multidimensional operations in conflict affected areas.

Ms Alexandra NASTASE, now Policy Analyst at the World Bank, former UN Youth Delegate back in 2011/2012, the mandate as a

United Nations Youth Delegate represents a significant professional development opportunity, but goes beyond work and succeeds to influence you as a person. When you understand the type of responsibility that you have been given as the voice of your generation at the most important political forum, this becomes irreversibly a character-building experience. In more practical terms, for me, it meant the moment when I realized that I want to dedicate my career to serving the community, and this has been the main driving force in my professional life so far.



At national level, we worked with various stakeholders to define our mandate, in order to make sure that our appeal to all Member States represents the Romanian youth. Based on the consultations we held, we chose to focus on prioritization of investments in youth employment, encouragement of active citizenship and recognition of volunteerism as an instrument to acquire practical skills for integration in the labor market. Moreover, we organized several events in which we aimed to bring the UN values closer to the Romanian Youth or the Romanian experience closer to the other UN Youth Delegates or Permanent Representations of different Member States to the United Nations.

Complementary to the representation and advocacy attributions, we also took an active role at the international level, working with youth-led organizations, Regional and National Youth Councils and the other United Nations Youth Delegates in order to advocate for the appointment of a Special Advisor to the Secretary General on Youth matters!

