

# SUNDAY 2 OCTOBER 2016

## FINAL OF THE EUROPEAN YOUTH DEBATING COMPETITION (EYDC)

A JOINT STEM EDUCATION PROJECT BETWEEN EPCA & PLASTICSEUROPE  
organized by young leaders GmbH

HOW WOULD YOU IMAGINE YOUR FUTURE – WITH OR  
WITHOUT THE PETROCHEMICAL INDUSTRY AND PLASTICS?



**EYDC FINAL WINNERS IN BUDAPEST:  
TIED FOR 1<sup>ST</sup> PLACE (LEFT TO  
RIGHT): MS. CAROLINE GAKPOTOR  
(WINNER OF THE UK NATIONAL  
EYDC FINAL) AND MS. GAÏA  
JEANNOT (WINNER OF THE FRENCH  
NATIONAL EYDC FINAL)**

National finals from April until September 2016 in nine countries in Europe. The European final will take place in October 2016 in Budapest.

**Giving young students the opportunity to debate the overarching theme  
"50 years of the chemical industry. What's next?"**

The European Youth Debating Competition is a joint project between:

Organized by young leaders GmbH

**OFFICIAL EYDC 2016 BANNER**



THE TEN WINNERS OF THE FINAL DEBATE OF THE EUROPEAN YOUTH DEBATING COMPETITION (EYDC) 2016 ALONG WITH HERMAN VAN ROMPUY, FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL (2009-2014), EPCA PRESIDENT TOM CROTTY, PLASTICEUROPE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR KARL-H FOERSTER, AND EPCA ANNUAL MEETING MODERATOR NADINE DEREZA, ON STAGE AT THE EYDC AWARDS CEREMONY DURING THE EPCA 50TH ANNIVERSARY ANNUAL MEETING CLOSING LUNCH

On Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> October, EPCA witnessed the final of the European Youth Debating Competition<sup>1</sup> (EYDC), in which 32 young participants from across the continent were tasked to argue both for and against the petrochemical industry and plastics, highlighting its virtues but also its challenges.

Kicking off this Youth debate, former DOW Chemical executive, Theo Walthie, and marine biologist, Dr. Onno Groß, from the marine conservation group, Deepwave, provided two contrasting views of the industry and the future. Both the pro and con speakers made their points to the youth with exuberance.

Describing how petrochemicals continue to positively impact and transform practically every aspect of the world we live in, Theo Walthie said: "Chemicals is the industry of all industries!" Manufacturing, agriculture, transportation, food production and distribution, the appliances we use every day, medicine, communication, and information technology all both benefit from and rely on the petrochemical sector, the former DOW executive continued. "Today, your mobile phone has more computing power than Apollo 11, which went to the moon. That wouldn't be possible without petrochemicals." But Walthie said the industry is both coming

to terms with and offering solutions to the most pressing issue of our time: managing climate change and achieving sustainability. He believes the industry's capacity for technological innovation will help further transform computing to enable us to live and work smarter, and more efficiently. Petrochemicals can help foster a healthcare revolution as we move towards personalized medicine. But the industry is changing too, and Walthie reckons that over the next 50-100 years bio-feedstocks will replace oil and gas as the building blocks of production.

Dr. Onno Groß began by referencing fifteenth century theologian, Martin Luther, who, when asked what should be done in dark and difficult times, said: "Plant an apple tree!" Groß's point was that apple trees are self-sustaining and part of the circle of natural ecology, unlike the petrochemical sector, which is currently over-reliant on fossil feedstocks that are climate changing and finite – oil and gas – and contribute to a huge problem of waste that threatens the health of our environment. Human consumption of resources is already depleting the oceans: "90% of big fish – like shark and tuna – have been fished out of the water, and coral has been reduced by 50%." Another huge marine problem is plastic waste. It's reckoned there are 150m tonnes of plastic waste in the oceans today, and the quantity



#### AGATHE MARPLES

*Runner-up of the Belgian National EYDC final and participant in the EYDC Final in Budapest*

The European Youth Debating Competition provided me with an indispensable experience where I learned not only about the petrochemical industry, but also about its importance to our future and the part we play in it. The EYDC experience allowed me to interact with industry representatives and listen to the views of the important leaders of today. Debating has also taught me respect and open-mindedness for the knowledge that I haven't yet learned about, and how valuable it is.

<sup>1</sup> The European Petrochemical Association (EPCA) and PlasticsEurope joined forces to promote STEM education (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) in Europe. They launched a new series of European Youth Debating Competitions ([www.eydc.eu](http://www.eydc.eu)) throughout nine European countries, with a grand finale held in Budapest in the framework of the EPCA 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Annual Meeting.



### EZRA PARDOVITCH

*Winner of the Dutch National EYDC final and participant in the EYDC Final in Budapest*

The EYDC for me was one of the best experiences of my life. I've established friendships with other youngsters from all over Europe and I see some of these friendships lasting a lifetime. I would like to thank young leaders GmbH and EPCA for this great opportunity and hope to be part of another EPCA Annual Meeting in the future, whether this is in Budapest or any place else.



**GAÏA JEANNOT, JOINT WINNER OF THE FINAL DEBATE OF THE EUROPEAN YOUTH DEBATING COMPETITION (EYDC) 2016**

is rising by up to 20m tonnes each year. Marine diesel emissions and oil spills are also contaminating the seas, which may be left both empty and dirty for coming generations. Waste is a human problem, the biologist continued. "There's no waste in nature: everything is reused or recycled." For these reasons, the petrochemical and plastics sector needs to develop a new plant-based economy and ecology, which is fossil carbon free. Bio-feedstock is the key, and the industry should come up with creative and responsible products, making better use of pre-design technologies. Groß concluded that the industry had to break its linkage with oil and gas, reduce hazardous waste, be more proactive, and develop a waste-free and sustainable "circle economy."

In the tradition of debating, both opening speakers were on the clock, and struggled to keep to the allocated time. But their younger counterparts followed them with an array of impressive, compelling and relentless contributions, all delivered within tight time constraints. With certain speakers tasked to either defend or criticize the sector, others were able to make their short contributions on a free basis. It was a lively, thoughtful, and entertaining session.

Those speaking for the industry peppered the judges and the audience with positives. It was suggested that plastics should be considered one of the greatest milestones in human development because these materials have transformed the world in which we live, by opening up the possibility of new products used in almost every sector of human industry and activity. Open a fridge, and there you will find a range of products

from food packaging to fridge parts that keep food safer for longer, improving human health and helping reduce waste. Get sick or need medical or surgical treatment, and petrochemical products – from drugs, syringes, bone cements, blood bags and lightweight prosthetics to plasters, delivery and drainage tubes, tissue engineering, cell growth scaffolding and artificial plastic organs – will help restore health and wellbeing. Petrochemicals have also transformed the way humans and machines communicate, facilitating the computing revolution from the mainframe to the laptop and smart phone. And the tough, lightweight, malleable materials that the industry produces are transforming industrial and domestic energy generation, delivery and use, and increasing the efficiency of road, rail, marine and air transportation.

A key point made over and over by industry proponents, was the sector's capacity for step-change innovation. When it comes to some of the most pressing problems facing the world today, this industry can help deliver solutions. Look how advanced materials are transforming the renewable energy sector. Look at the revolution in home energy use, with insulation and low-energy heating and lighting delivered thanks to petrochemical products. And look, too, at the industry's ongoing development of biochemistry as an alternative to oil-and-gas-based production.

But along with the positives, the industry had to face up to its problems, the critics argued. Here is an industry still reliant on finite resources that are set to run out within decades. And while bio-feedstock may be an interesting development, the quantities available are currently insufficient to replace

fossil feeds, so CO<sub>2</sub> emissions will continue to grow. The industry also has a responsibility for the waste generated by its products, and while the final consumer has a major impact in this regard, the producers have a cradle-to-grave responsibility to work with governments, politicians and educators to improve awareness of sustainability imperatives. Serious concerns were also raised about the impact of the industry's toxic and hazard products, and the as yet unquantifiable long-term effects of certain chemicals in the ecosphere. What impact is plastics ingestion having on people, animals and plants? Is genetic transmutation occurring? And what about the linkage between oil and gas and war?

Alongside the pros and cons, were those who saw both the negative and the positive outcomes of the industry. But in their judgment the good far outweighed the bad, and they were very optimistic about the industry's capacity to find and fix its own faults. Overall, these young people offered a critical but ultimately positive view of petrochemicals and plastics. This is an industry they believe has the ability to adapt to overcome both the challenges that it faces as an industrial sector and those facing the world at large. They insist on the need to work together for the generations to come and to educate people and society to act responsibly. The task ahead for the industry will involve recruiting sufficient talent to maintain its creative evolution. It should perhaps start by looking at the talent evident in every single young speaker who participated in this debate. They were all outstanding!

To learn more, please visit: [www.eydc.eu](http://www.eydc.eu)