Into the Blue

*How young Europeans feel about the EU and what they wish for Europe's future**

Introduction

When the European financial crisis climbed to a next level in November 2011, shortly after Mario Monti and Lucas Papademos formed technocratic governments in Italy and Greece, we began to wonder where Europe was heading, not only economically but also in its role as a political union and a community of people. As it happened, we were busy doing internships in three European capitals that seemingly set the tone these days—Paris, Berlin, and Rome. We updated ourselves regularly on the latest political developments and popular protests. Soon we noticed how unsure we were whether Merkozy's safeguarding activism was correct or if we even understood the politico-economic proceedings to an extent that allowed us to form an opinion in the first place. More importantly, we were uncertain about our own generation's stance towards the European project at this time. Had the EU grown ahead of itself, failing to explain its tasks, risking losing its people? Whilst public intellectuals such as Jürgen Habermas and Timothy Garton Ash proclaimed their elaborate visions of Europe's future[1], we wanted to know what our generation thinks. What motivates young Europeans with regard to the EU and where do they expect more? What is *their* vision for the future of Europe? The most obvious way to find out was to go out to Europe and ask them.

During ten weeks we travelled through 20 European countries, visiting a total of 27 cities. In each city we spoke to young people whom we randomly selected in streets, parks, cafes, on public squares and university grounds.[2] Among the interviewees were (in equal shares) women and men aged between 16 and 35 who are students, professionals, or unemployed. Our focus was on these young people because we believe that they form a generation that is decisive for the European project. Unless otherwise preferred, all interviews were recorded on video and audio. The response rate was above 50%. Usually, an interview started with a few warm-up questions about personal details. In the main part we asked questions about the interviewees' perceived benefits and harms of the EU, their identification with Europe, solidarity with other European people, and visions for

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[1] See Garton Ash, T. (2009): "Europe's New Story", in: *Facts Are Subversive*, Atlantic, London; and Habermas, J. (2012): *Zur Verfassung Europas*, Suhrkamp, Berlin.

[2] Our results do not satisfy statistic accuracy since our sample size was too small and our method of selection not randomised as according to statistical standards. We would like to stress, however, that we kept the range of people we interviewed as wide as possible.

the future of the common political project. We asked them how the EU affected their lives and where they expected more from Brussels. The interviews also touched upon national particularities, personal biographies as well as recent political decisions. Rather than applying a strict questionnaire we engaged into actual conversations, ranging from a few minutes to several hours. The answers we collected are qualitative rather than quantitative, they contain unusual arguments and intimate biographical experiences. They are stories from Europe. In total we accumulated more than 200 interviews of this type.

Besides these spontaneous interrogations in the public, we had previously arranged a number of events. On the one hand, these included interviews with politicians, scholars, journalists, and diplomats who are profoundly experienced in European affairs—hereafter referred to as "experts". On the other hand, we organised a number of small conferences with students and student organisations. Among the experts were members of the Dutch, British, French, Slovakian, Latvian, Swedish, and the European Parliament as well as advisors to foreign affairs ministries. The non-governmental organisations we talked to include the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP), the European Studies Centre at Oxford University, Notre Europe, friends of europe, EuropressResearch Bologna, Soul of Europe, the Konstantinos Karamanlis Foundation, the Turkish Policy Quaterly (TPQ), the Open Estonian Foundation, and the Finnish institute of International Affairs. The political journalists interviewed work for the BBC, Le Figaro, Corriere della Sera, Polityka, Der Standard, and Kathimerini. We also interviewed members of eurosceptic parties such as the UK Independence Party, the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, and the True Finns. As for the small conferences, we co-operated with regional offices of the European Youth Parliament, the Polish Forum of Young Diplomats, the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, FORES, and Agora Jeunes (France).

Through our interviews and discussions we have gained a clearer picture of why the European youth has mixed feelings about Europe. In the seven stories below we would like to share the most widespread and important sentiments of our generation across Europe. First, the peace argument is no longer an apparent narrative for our generation. Second, there is a general lack of visions for the future of Europe. Third, the EU's most popular benefits are travelling and Erasmus. On the other hand, fourth, young Europeans regard EU institutions as bureaucratic and economic-centred, while, fifth, politicians are mistrusted both on the national and European level. Sixth, most Europeans feel at least somewhat European, while some identify neither with their nation nor Europe. And seventh, a considerable number of young Europeans is in favour of cross-national solidarity but expects clear rules. In the second part of this paper we attempt to translate young people's demands into concrete policy recommendations. These ideas for the future of Europe include: furthering the support of classic EU-benefits, i.e. open borders and exchange programmes, improving English language skills, establishing a real European democracy with concise responsibilities and transparent elections, and strengthening the European civil society by reaching out to more than only europhile elites. If we had to reveal our result in one sentence, we would say that we underestimated our generation's frustration with the political establishment (that has lead to a certain carelessness towards the EU), whilst its benefits—international exchange and open borders—are clearly appreciated.

Stories from our journey

Peace is taken for granted

Young people do not look to Europe's past when thinking about European integration.

An expression most frequently heard during our trip was that the historical achievements of the EU "cannot be taken for granted". However, this ominous warning was not often put forward by our young interviewees. In contrast, it was remarkably popular among the more than 40 experts we talked to on our journey. Indeed, the claim that peace in Europe should not be taken for granted is the "typical pro-European case", as European Studies Professor Timothy Garton Ash pointed out in a 2009 speech.[3] When asked to pass on a message to the European young, Polish Member of the EP Róza Thun said: "What you take for granted, namely democracy and peace, is not granted at all." Similarly, the Executive Vice President of the Rome-situated Istituto Affari Internazionali, Gianni Bonvincini, called upon the European youth: "We have to think to the past. The dream of Europe was to overcome war for the future. The new generation needs to take into account that the basic value is to maintain peace and to cooperate." The list could be continued – the peace argument is the most commonly told narrative among European intellectuals and politicians.

Apparently, their message has not reached the European youth. Only about five of our more than 200 interviewees mentioned that they appreciate the European integration process in its peacekeeping dimension. An example of these few exceptions is a Dutch student we met in Antwerp: "I'm really grateful for the EU to have secured peace in Europe. It's a good starting point for the world to become a more peaceful place." It is the most evident of all our findings that whenever young people reflect about the benefits of the European political project, the do not look much to the past and to the Europe of armed conflicts. Even where history of war or firing orders at communist borders are less distant, like in the Balkan states or Eastern Europe, we did not find peace to be a prevalent issue. The "speed of forgetting" among European young people, as Timothy Garton Ash has titled this phenomenon, is indeed remarkably high.[4]

We believe that we must put up with the fact that the arguments relating to the past, especially in relation to deterring wartime Europe, will not be the crucial message to make young Europeans enthusiastic about the EU. Clearly, this is a natural development: Whereas our grandfathers could still tell stories about World War II, it is something distant to our generation. With time passing, peace will increasingly be taken for granted. This is by no means to say that young Europeans need not bear history in mind – they definitely must and history stays an argument. Yet, to reach out to the young, you need to substantially complement it with other arguments, especially where many young consider the future to be uncertain. As European Studies professor Paul Scheffer from the Netherlands emphasised: "Beyond 'never again', there is a need for a renewed justification

[3] Speech held on June 23, 2009 at the Institute of International and European Affairs, Dublin, http://www.iiea.com/events/towards-a-g3

[4] Speech held on June 23, 2009 at the Institute of International and European Affairs, Dublin, http://www.iiea.com/events/towards-a-g3

for European integration."[5] Our further analysis hence focuses on the question what other areas can be motivating for the European youth.

No visions for Europe

A general disinterest in European politics prevents young Europeans from reflecting thoroughly upon the future of the political project EU.

Some commentators and politicians indeed started to realise the old world quality of the 'never again'. In search of alternatives, the idea of a 'new European narrative' recently came up in the German debate: personalities like the former German minister of finances Peer Steinbrück or editor of the German daily Tagesspiegel, Gerd Appenzeller, claimed that in order to revitalise enthusiasm for the European project, "we need a new narrative for Europe".[6] It was also this debate that enhanced the motivation to launch our project Euroskop in late 2011: Given that peace is not the most promising candidate, what would the vision of young people for the future of European integration be? We had hoped that we would get to hear several stories what the EU should be about: The vision of a union for economic purposes only, the narrative of the EU as foreign policy actor, as a democracy exporter or the like.

Unfortunately, we did not find what we were looking for: Most of our interviewees did not have any strong or appealing pictures for the future, let alone was there one outstanding vision shared by a majority. In contrast, answers remained generally vague and illustrated a widespread lack of opinion about the topic. A typical reaction on the street or even on university campuses: "Europe? I don't really know. I can give you the number of a friend who knows about this." Even assuring that our inquiry was about opinion, not about knowledge did not help to persuade everyone to talk to us. Like Slovakian business student Denisa in Bratislava, they often openly admitted: "I don't really think about the EU, but if I think about it, it doesn't really mean anything to me." With some sense of irony, Baiba, a young Estonian student, answered the question about the raison d'être of the EU: "What it is about? You can look it up in the map!"

This lack of opinion, which correlates with a lack of knowledge about EU affairs, is closely linked to the feeling that EU affairs are so far away from the people that it is nothing you would have to care about. The EU is commonly perceived as "somewhere in Brussels where some guys make decisions about us we don't have a say in", as 21-year old Iris, economics student in Rotterdam, put it. The stories about "Deep mistrust in politicians" and "A complex bureaucracy mainly about the economy" will explain this phenomenon elaborately. In general, we believe that the lack of visions also points to the character of a generation that is somewhat depoliticised. There is a tendency of young people to selectively raise their voices for particular goals in unconventional ways, with social media being their political forum. The outcry against the ACTA legislation was a

[5] "EU no longer can play the war card", De Morgen/Presseurop, January 19, 2012, http://www.presseurop.eu/en/content/article/1416561-eu-can-no-longer-play-war-card

[6] Gerd Appenzeller: "Europa braucht eine neue Erzählung", Tagesspiegel, November 1st, 2011, http://www.tagesspiegel.de/meinung/deutschland-in-der-eu-europa-braucht-eine-neue-erzaehlung/4679602.html

positive sign of transnational debate, yet it happened outside the established democratic institutions and was not necessarily an expression of any wider political idea. Similarly, the Pirates all across Europe still lack party programmes concerning the society as a whole. For many young we met, visionary political thinking is out, and this applies to politics on a European level even more than politics on the national level.

One could, at least with regard to Europe, see this as not too big a problem. Yves Bertoncini, Director of Notre Europe, whom we met in Paris pointed out that "European politics is by nature not very present in young people's daily lives. Unless you are a farmer, you simply do not need to know about European directives. It is a mistake by the EU institutions to promote the EU as if it can change their lives." But even if one concedes that nation states might still be responsible for most relevant things in their lives, we do not believe that this exempts them from reflecting and getting informed about an institution that has become part of political and social reality. In addition, the next chapter will show that one must in fact acknowledge that it is part of their daily lives.

Travelling and Erasmus

The EU's most popular benefits are open borders and exchange programmes – young Europeans' real-life experiences.

Sometimes it is hard to begin an interview about European politics by going in medias res. As the conversation began, one of the questions that we were most frequently asked was: "Where have you travelled so far?" Our interviewees asked us for our route and experiences, for our motivation and funding. The journey was clearly more interesting to them than our political inquiry. Once they started to think about Europe, they realised that travelling and open borders was their main positive association. Young Europeans increasingly go abroad for holidays, school, university, or working, where they make friends, improve their language skills and discover foreign customs. To some extent Europe has become their home. They use Interrail to explore other European countries, study abroad as part of Erasmus, and pay with a common currency. When we asked for personal advantages of the EU, almost all of our respondents replied with one of the above practical advantages. Hardly anyone mentioned peace, economic prosperity, or international strategic power (cf. "Peace is taken for granted"). The true EU-benefits for our generation are graspable elements in their daily lives.

"I don't know how EU affects me", said Latvian student Baiba. And after a short break she continued: "Yeah, well travelling." We frequently heard similar statements of this (somewhat unsophisticated) kind: Our interviewees often mentioned the advantages of travelling while neglecting that the EU had any effect on them. Few young Europeans take notice of EU politics – and if they do their impression is often bad (cf. "A complex bureaucracy mainly about the economy"). What many do realise, however, are things that fundamentally improve their standard of living. The ability to study all across Europe while receiving student loans and not having to stop at borders is perceived as an immense benefit. Why is all this important for our generation? First, being educated abroad improves career chances, as does the ability to work abroad. Second, open borders are part of an ideology that guides young Europeans these days: "The EU has made us more open and tolerant", said an English girl whom we met in Belgium where she was

spending her Erasmus. Third, travelling is fun and paying with a single currency is convenient.

One may ask: Is it wrong that our generation wants to only enjoy the benefits that post-war European history has offered them? Of course, more political engagement is always desirable. On the other hand travelling and Erasmus is fine, because Europe becomes hollow if its citizens do not take the opportunity to go abroad, learn languages and discover their neighbours. Without people *living* Europe there will be no European population. A Portuguese girl explained accordingly: "Now that I did Erasmus and all my friends did it, I feel European." (cf. "Feeling European, somehow"). So travelling seems to be the basis for Europe, a key to make young people aware of the political construct in the background. During our stay in the UK we met Timothy Garton Ash. He touched upon the same notion, saying: "There already is this EasyJet Europe, the young generation's feeling to be able to take a budget flight to a European capital Friday evening. [...] We have to build upon this." So liveable aspects of EU-integration—such as Erasmus, the Euro, affordable infrastructure, lower roaming costs, or common power plugs—are crucial connection points for young Europeans.

Libor Roucek, Czech social democrat and Vice-president of the EP, knew how young Europeans would respond to our questions. In our interview with him, he tried to create a link between their perceptions and EU policies: "To have these freedoms [...] somebody has to run the institutions that make them possible. For instance, if we don't have controls on inner borders we have to jointly control our external borders. And that's why we have the European Union." He explained why it is inconsistent to praise open borders without acknowledging EU-institutions, or why Erasmus would never work without central coordination. Roucek has accurately analysed where to pick up the young generation, but the EU has largely failed to take this opportunity (cf. "Erasmus for Everyone" and "Challenges for civil society actors"). Another example of real-life aspects that matter to young people are roaming costs. After our interview with Raymond Knops, chairman of the committee on European affairs in the Dutch parliament, we talked to his young assistant Jorn who comes from a town five minutes away from the German border: "I always get 'Vodafone.de' instead of '.nl' and am paying triple the amount", he lamented. "That just doesn't make any sense to me. European unification should be an advantage for everyone." So Europe's future depends considerably on the way EU politicians succeed to revive the union's perceived benefits, rather than establishing a bureaucracy for its own sake.

A complex bureaucracy mainly about the economy

The EU is perceived as being too bureaucratic and having a wrong focus on economics.

As we have mentioned earlier, knowledge about the EU might be limited (cf. "No visions for Europe"). But there are some main sentiments about European institutions the young repeatedly voiced. Young people find the EU too bureaucratic; they opine that it should focus less on partial interests and economics; and some would like it to increase its positive influence in their countries, while respecting national traditions.

"The negative part of it is probably the whole overhead craziness", said Sebastian, a young Viennese, when we asked him about the EU. Sebastian summarised the widespread feeling that Brussels' flaw is an excessive degree of bureaucracy. Behind this sentiment lies a two-sided phenomenon. On the one hand, there is the lack of contact points with the EU administration for the European youth (cf. "No visions for Europe"). Young people hardly know anyone in the European Parliament. Few debates on EU legislation with few exceptions like the ACTA controversy raise young peoples' attention. On the other side, much of the communication that reaches the young public as a result of European decision processes appears to be very complex in language, content, and relevance.

The Euro crisis is in some way an exception: It is seen by the young as the dominant issue in European politics. However, it does so with a negative connotation, which has had two disastrous effects on the young's perception of the EU. First, many no longer trust the EU to be an impartial and significant actor in important European matters. The young public sphere feels that the EU administration is bypassed or misused by the economically strong whenever it comes to critical issues on the European level. Secondly, due to the visibility of European economic matters in recent times, young people have the feeling that the EU is mainly about economics. And it annoys them, like this young man from the UK: "The EU should have a smaller focus on economic stuff, and more on rights-based stuff." While agreeing on this point, there are different recommendations on what the EU should do instead: "[It] needs to be more political and cultural", said a young Italian. Others think that it should focus more on values, on cooperation, on border control, on social issues, and so forth.

Nevertheless, European economic interventions are not seen as purely negative. In Italy several students implied that they would be happy if the EU took care of some of the Italian economic administration, like a young Italian student: "I trust in the EU institutions. I think in a situation like Italy, an institution like Europe is important because it gives a direction on politics." Going east, the positive influence of the rule of law and democratic processes on society and politics plays a more prominent role. From outside the EU, a young Serbian girl named Yugoslava said that her country "[…] is in a transition period and the EU offers easier ways for our country to become democratic." When considering these positive implications, it is no surprise that quite a few people asked for more integration. Some even voted for a fully-fledged political union: "In Europe maybe, it's time to give up some sovereignty." But those promoting the idea of a political union instantly qualify their own statement. Most would not like the EU to intervene in social issues of their country. Others are afraid that regional traditions and national interests lose their relevance. And many are afraid to lose some of their national heritage: "National pride in Europe is very important because every country has had its own history", said a French girl on the streets.

The young are willing to integrate further, if and only if the attractiveness, efficiency and imparity of the EU administration are meliorated; if national traditions are uncoupled from national politics, and if economics makes room for other topics on the political agenda.

Deep mistrust in politicians

National politicians are often regarded as corrupt and selfish. EU politicians risk loosing their head start, unless they improve their trustworthiness and appearance.

In Athens we were kindly invited to speak with an advisor to the Karamanlis Foundation, Nea Dimokratia's political think tank. We had coincidentally scheduled our interview on the memorial day for former party leader and EU-outrider Konstantinos Karamanlis. As we found ourselves amidst the entire party elite we started to talk to various guests, including a former minister and a well-known journalist. Everyone confidently prophesied Antonis Samaras to become Greece' next Prime Minister, nobody dared to think that the upcoming elections would not even suffice for a grand coalition with PASOK. The same day, a few hours later, we returned to Syntagma Square where young Greeks conveyed quite a different impression. Gerasimos, a 22-year old engineer, was furious at the political establishment. In his own life he made every effort to be successful: After school he took a university student loan, became an engineer, searched a job, eventually found one abroad, came back and got politically involved. "You cannot trust our politicians", he said. "I know that Greece needs a change, but without other politicians, without a radical change this is not going to happen."

Sadly this phenomenon is not limited to Greece. Dissatisfaction with political leaders is one of the dominant sentiments of our generation. All over the continent young Europeans decreasingly believe that politicians represent their interests. For instance, in Spain a young artist told us that "politicians should look for the people and not their own interests." As a consequence many young Europeans refuse to discuss or even observe politics. Nobody told us that they wanted to become a politician, not even politically interested students, as we learned in a discussion with young Serbian scholars. Some, like a French student in Paris, go so far as to say: "I'm sorry, but I don't believe in politics." One of the reasons for their dissatisfaction is that politicians are "far away" from the people. That is to say, they deal with things that are supposed to be near to people in a way that is incomprehensible and lifted off (cf. "A complex bureaucracy mainly about the economy"). Another reason are dubious political careers, such as the improbable success of at least four members of the Karamanlis dynasty in Greece – all of them either minister or prime minister – or the story of Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borisov who started his political career as bodyguard to former communist leader Todor Zhivkov.

Of course extent and type of the critique vary. While in southern and south-eastern parts of Europe corruption was regarded as a principle evil, other citizens complained about bureaucratic incrustations, power-hungriness, and self-orientation. During our stay in Paris, shortly before the presidential elections, a young law student told us: "We're in election time, so many politicians make promises. We all know that more than 50% of their promises are false." Especially in southern and eastern countries, a reason for young people's mistrust is the enormous spread of (perceived) corruption. In Hungary, Noemi, a school pupil, told us: "I come from a poor district in Budapest. There should have been developments here, but the politicians took all the money. It's all because of the corruption." Any social failure is blamed on supposedly incapable and corrupt politicians, no matter if this is actually true or not.

Most young Europeans believe that there is more corruption on the national than on the European level, as a student in Rome indicated: "I trust European politicians more because there is more corruption in Italy." Others say that they are equally sceptical towards European politicians, but just do not know as much about them. Either way, it seems that EU-politicians have not yet gambled away their trustworthiness. However, they suffer another problem – they are unknown. Young Europeans expect them to act, as a Belgian student opines: "The EU-politicians should become closer to the citizens, but I don't know how. That's their problem, not mine." Although her statement sounds slightly sullen, she makes an important point. EU-politicians owe something to their citizens, too. They cannot always blame the population for not being interested in EU affairs.

Feeling European, somehow

Young people increasingly consider themselves European along with their national identity, even if there is a tendency to go global.

How European do young Europeans feel? In Madrid, our host Berta introduced us to Carlos, a 26-year old university teacher at the Universidad de Navarra. His reasoning on the issue, although not the most commonly heard response of young people, sheds light on the relevant dimension of the question. Do you feel more European or more Spanish, Carlos? His answer: "First of all, I feel human; second, I feel European; and third, I feel Spanish, which does not mean that I am not proud to be Spanish. I am extremely proud!"

Global, European, national – the idea that you have multiple identities is something that many young Europeans share (if not necessarily in this threefold dimension). They adhere to their national identity; but they also feel European. Typically, the national identity is stronger and better defined than the European one. Obviously, those who have been travelling, studying, or living abroad are more willing to consider themselves as somehow European than those who have not. Inversely, those who have not had such experiences struggle with this European identity, as the statement of an Italian student at Universitá degli Studi Roma Tre suggests: "I do not feel so European because I have not travelled a lot and I don't know the traditions of other European countries."[7] Some interviewees were even optimistic that the or a European identity would grow in the future. As a young Greek said: "I think that the next generations will not say I'm from Greece. They will say I'm from Europe."

Another interesting aspect about Carlos' answer is his remark about his identity as a human being. For many young, one of the most thrilling things about Europe is the removal of borders (cf. "Travelling and Erasmus"). Like a Spanish student in Madrid opined: "What I am proud of concerning Europe is the destruction of international borders." In fact, quite a few people we met did not care too much of some kind of European identity. Equality of every human being is a very attractive claim among young people. Why, then, restrict oneself to feeling connected to Europeans only? "It is good to

[7] This general rule – the more experiences abroad, the more identification with Europe – bears country-specific exceptions, of course. For example, we spoke to many young British that had been travelling and were not eurosceptic at all, but still they did not consider themselves as Europeans.

be part of something bigger, something international", Nora, studying social work in Budapest, states pointing at her global identity. And when we ask a young Belgian in Brussels: European or Belgian? He responds: "More than that. A person of the world."

To be fair, we also encountered some voices fearful about the loss of their national identity: "If feeling European meant losing a cultural identity, it is nothing desirable", Amory, a 21-year old French business student, assumed that this was actually the case. And also those feeling European somehow argued often like Italian economics student Mattéo: "It's important that we feel European, but people have also got to know that I am Italian, German etc. Our cities or countries are so important in our lives." Is it perhaps utopian to promote the coexistence of a European and national identities? In Amsterdam, we met European Studies professor Menno Spiering, who doubted that an identity with a bigger entity other than nation states could be stable "unless you use coercion. Only if you use strong measures, people can be persuaded to change their identity. But even then it takes very long and can collapse again."

Nevertheless, from the majority of conversations we had it does not seem implausible to feel both European and also identify with one's nation. In fact, this is what is happening already within a large part of the European young. That "the European citizens take up a European and a national identity parallel", as German philosopher Jürgen Habermas claimed in his recent essay on the state of Europe,[8] is, of course, something very demanding. European citizenship can only grow if the young get sufficient intellectual input about European politics and culture and have the chance to get to know the continent (cf. "Erasmus for everyone" and "Challenges for civil society actors").

If you help me, I will help you

The young feel solidarity towards European people, not towards European governments.

An important side-effect of the European debt crisis lies in the rising level of financial loans and transfer payments among the union states. Are these solidarity payments backed by a young European generation, even though it cannot clearly define its European identity (cf. "Feeling European, somehow")? Or do these payments go beyond what the young find appropriate? In order to find out we asked our interviewees one of the following two questions: "How much of your personal income would you be willing to spend to save Greece?", and "Why should other nations help your economically stumbling country?"

The apparent sentiment of those potentially or factually relying on the help of more solvent union states was summed up well by Rodrigo, one of our discussion partners in Lisbon: "If we were the rich country we would have the obligation to give financial support to countries with financial problems as well." A union, this stance holds, should support its frail union partners. This ideal is quite spread in southern Europe, even if the young willingly admit that mistakes have been committed – mainly by their disappointing politicians (cf. "Deep mistrust in politicians"). On the other hand the young people we

[8] Habermas, J. (2011): *Zur Verfassung Europas*, Suhrkamp, Berlin, p.25.

met work hard or are desperately trying to find a job and thus doubt that they themselves are the prime reason for their and their family's economic hardship. This produces a feeling of injustice when hearing that other countries are better off and in their heads logically invokes solidarity.

On the other side, an interviewee in the UK held that one national people should not pay for another. The nation state should be ensuring the functioning of its economy and ultimately the wellbeing of its people: "As much as we are unified, it's up to the nation state to raise money from their income." This is exactly the reason because of which the Slovakian government, backed by its people, stood against the bail-out of Greece in October 2011. Thus, one story we hear from the young across the continent is very clear: "We don't pay the same taxes, so we shouldn't support Greece." Is this the conclusion? The young in countries in distress expect support from the wealthier ones and the latter are not willing to provide it, both due to a sentiment of justice? We have learned that this antagonism is an important part of the truth among the young people. However, luckily, there are other sides to our generation's attitude.

"We should make sure that at least everywhere in Europe everyone can live a normal life with a good standard," said a young girl on the street in Brussels. And a student in Stockholm agreed: "I'm a poor student, so I don't know. But I definitely think that we, as a nation, should help them." These are only two representative answers out of many, which express solidarity towards those in hardship. Especially amongst the younger people who have travelled a lot, solidarity extends beyond national borders (cf. "Travelling and Erasmus"). Apart from members of most nationalist parties like the True Finns and the United Kingdom Independence Party, about two thirds of the people we met would support the Greek people. However, there is a deeply rooted mistrust in structures and politicians (cf. "Mistrust in politicians" and "A complex bureaucracy mainly about the economy"). As another Belgian student expressed it: "We're part of the same community, so I guess there's a sort of solidarity with those people, not with their governments." This mistrust, plus the mentioned resentments against those taking advantage of the union partners' money, leave the young in the dilemma between their general willingness to support and the feeling of injustice and corrupted structures. When it comes to spending one's own money for others, many thus answer like this young Brit: "Yes, possibly. But I'd have to read the terms and conditions." Here, transparency is the necessary mean in order to build trust and allow people to show their solidarity.

Ideas for Europe's future

Keep the borders open

When national governments and EU home-affairs commissioner Cecilia Malmström proclaimed in 2011 that the Schengen-treaty would temporarily be complemented by a "reintroduction of limited internal border controls under very exceptional circumstances" the public across the continent was outraged. A reintroduction of armed border controls is an appalling image for most Europeans, especially for the young. We therefore stress the symbolic of open borders within the EU and promote the extension of the Schengen treaty, which since 1999 has become a central part of EU-wide law.

As demonstrated, the peace argument lost some of its relevance for the young, since peace and war are categories that normally seem beyond our life's experience (cf. "Peace is taken for granted"). Nevertheless, the instance mentioned above shows that major steps in the direction of separating the European society still provoke protest. This makes sense, since young Europeans love the freedom of travelling without being controlled, as we have pointed out (cf. "Travelling and Erasmus"). Restricted border access would deprive the European Union of its prime lever for rendering the young enthusiastic about the European project. When we passed the armed line between Turkey and Greece, we experienced ourselves how borders can convey a feeling of hostility and distinctiveness that we have long supervened within the union. That is why the full access to the Schengen-area should be opened to Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, and Cyprus as soon as possible.

However, there are some additional aspects to the issue. As described, many young Europeans have difficulties to separate their European identity from the feeling to be a citizen of the world. They are thus often critical of borders in general (cf. "Feeling European, somehow"). We claim that the EU has to signal to young Europeans that it is welcoming foreigners and generally interested to extend its external borders beyond Europe's geographical boundaries. Before the process of accepting new member states begins, it might even be sensible to facilitate mutual crossing of borders, through open borders or lower visa costs. Cooperation is easier when you know each other beforehand. Where this is impossible owing to political circumstances, borders should at least be open for certain groups, such as members of exchange programmes and students (cf. "Erasmus for everyone").

Erasmus for everyone

Since exchange programmes like Erasmus are for many of our interviewees the most significant achievements of the EU, this is certainly a field for further action. Some 230.000 students went abroad during 2010/11 as part of Erasmus. Although figures are increasing this still only covers a fraction of each student generation. Moreover it almost exclusively covers university students. While a small societal elite enjoys enriching time abroad, trainees, apprentices, civil servants, freelance workers, artists, and unemployed are largely excluded. The EU is systematically favouring the educational elite, leaving behind a large number of lower (or not so formally) educated people. However, young Europeans

from all countries and backgrounds want to spend time abroad, learn foreign languages and benefit from EU funding. Travelling does not only improve language skills and job perspectives, but also benefits young people's minds, as Aleksej, a young Estonian artist, suggested: "If Estonia gave money to all the local people to travel and see the world, Estonia would be a better place to be. [...] This was only a joke, but anyway a good one." So since travelling and exchange programmes are by far the most popular aspects about the EU it is time to invest more.

The latest EU initiative on student mobility "Erasmus for All" is a step in the right direction. The programme starting in 2014 will grant some €19 billion to students, teachers as well as to vocational trainings, volunteer and youth exchanges. Its expenses more than doubled compared with those between 2007 and 2013, it became more consistent and includes other groups than only students. However, it still does not include the widest possible range of young people across all social levels. It is not innovative enough to allow the kind of exchange that will foster European citizenship (cf. "Feeling European Somehow"). In an interview with Almut Möller, Head of European Policy Studies at German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP), we spoke about new ideas: "National Members of Parliament should know the EU Parliament, too. Maybe they should all go on an exchange year. [...] This is the only way administration units can learn from each other." Möller's suggestion might sound somewhat utopian, but the intention sensible. Why not include *everyone*? This would strengthen European identity, too, as Umberto Eco holds: "Erasmus has created the first generation of young Europeans. I call it a sexual revolution: a young Catalan man meets a Flemish girl – they fall in love, they get married and they become European, as do their children."[9]

Spending time abroad is a key experience for young Europeans. But at the moment these opportunities are limited to a small privileged circle, similar to the EU as a whole. In addition, programmes are poorly funded. Less than 1% of the EU's household goes to the Erasmus programme. For comparatively small budgets Brussels could improve the situation a lot. Our exemplary suggestions cover three areas.

(1) *Exchange programmes are a proven way to allow a wide range of young people to learn languages and experience other countries. They need further support:* increase number of school exchanges, increase number of university semesters abroad, significantly support exchange programmes for trainees and young professionals and invent exchange programmes for other fields of occupation.

(2) *Initiatives like the Bologna process are well-meant strategies to make education in Europe more accessible and comparable. However, there are more areas to work on*: unify school qualifications, unify university application systems, improve the ECTS system and unify teacher's education for more international flexibility.

(3) *Many solutions come from the people itself, rather than from above. The EU should increase support for citizen initiatives:* support worthwhile citizen initiatives such as the European Youth Parliament, simplify and enlarge funding programmes such as Youth in Action, increase

[9] As appeared in Gianni Riotta: *"Umberto Eco: It's culture, not war, that cements European identity"*, La Stampa, Thursday 26 January 2012.

support for European volunteers and increase support for international sport and music events.

English is essential

Part of the reason why so few young Europeans have visions for Europe's political future is because they do not talk about it (cf. "No visions for Europe"). During our trip we were appalled by the partially poor level of English, especially across southern Europe. Language barriers are too high for genuine European debates, although there is a clear demand. We were often asked "What did young people in other countries say?" People want to communicate and exchange, but they need a common language. Indeed, a political body is only vivid when its leaders verbally confront each other and newspapers write about it. Without a Lingua Franca this becomes almost impossible. As of today, public discourse in Europe remains largely national. Secondly, the *political* discourse is hampered as arguments are first translated rather than immediately countered – which is one of the reasons why EP debates appear so rarely on TV. But speaking a common language is also important for social interaction and civil actors. Movements from the basis of society can hardly be started in 23 languages simultaneously. Finally, administrative processes and official paperwork could be simplified through a common language. Consider the barriers (and costs) for a young entrepreneur when moving his business abroad.

English is by far the most obvious option. It is already widely spoken, one of the easiest European languages to learn, and is also used as a mediation language in other parts of the world. Its cultural tradition in Europe is unquestionable. Private and commercial actors already use it on many occasions. The advantages of more English are clear: a more interactive, deliberative democracy with common media and a shared public sphere. This is not to say that English should replace national languages, it should become an additional mode of communication. In the same way that people identify both with their nation and the EU, they should also be able to communicate both in their national language and Europe's Lingua Franca, English.

The ways to improve English skills across Europe are manifold. A principle field of action are schools. In Madrid we met two young English teachers (one of which a native speaker) who told us that they earned no more than 1000 EUR per month. Increasing teachers' salaries is a necessary first step. Schools should also be equipped with native speaking teachers and make English a compulsory course. Furthermore, exchange programmes for both teachers and pupils need further support, as time abroad is the most efficient and authentic way to learn languages. Another field of action lies outside politics. Today English speaking Europe-wide media are largely inexistent. Projects like the "European Daily" are worthwhile but rare. If European television stations were more courageous, there would be plenty of innovative formats in English (or at least subtitled). It is astonishing how dominantly present the duo Merkozy was on Europe's stage without ever having spoken to each other in the public. We need public debates across borders. As one of our interviewees in Berlin put it: "We need Scandinavian conditions. Their English is excellent, they watch films in English, and never have they risked to loose their culture."

More democracy

Given the lack of visions for European politics, the mistrust in politicians in general and the perception of the European Union as an overly bureaucratic ravel of institutions, the EU has to become more democratic. The widespread feeling of powerlessness, the feeling that decisions in the EU were often considered to be made by those "somewhere in Brussels" (cf. "No vision for Europe") is closely linked to a lack of interest for the EU. If we want people to care about European politics, it is necessary to provide them with the opportunity to make a difference. This insight has been often be displayed. Yet, reforms like the Lisbon Treaty have apparently not done enough to back up EU decision-making with popular support. We would like to point at two known ideas we found especially appealing given our conversations with both young people and experts.

(1) *Grant the European Parliament the right of initiative*. The Lisbon Treaty strengthened the powers of the European Parliament. Yet it still has not got the right to initiate legislation on its own, one of the most crucial powers of democratically elected parliaments. The best signals the EU can give towards its citizens is to grant them the right to influence European policy-making not only through their national governments (which they often do not trust anyway, cf. "Deep mistrust in politicians"), but also through a proper representation of the European people. In consequence, European elections would be valorised, media would report accordingly and European citizens would start to take an interest.

(2) *Create transnational lists*. During our visit to the EP in Brussels, Liberal deputy Andrew Duff told us: "National political parties have a great monopoly on the elections of the EP, on the selection of the candidates and on the drafting of the programmes. Hence, it is perfectly clear that they will never engage voters with the politics of the EU." Presently, the European affairs are presented to voters only through the filter of national parties. The electoral reform proposed by Andrew Duff and the Constitutional Affairs Committee in April 2011 calls for creating a transnational list in addition to present national lists. Voters could not only choose between candidates from their nationality, but from all across the Union. They would have to think about their vote not in terms of national politics, but in terms of European issues. Pan-European parties could attract interesting personalities to Brussels instead of B-politicians, which would again stimulate voters and the media's interest. Assuming that a European feeling has begun to grow already, (cf. "Feeling European, somehow"), such a double vote in the European elections would suit the multiple identity of many young.

Empower European citizens

Many of the policies we have recommended centred on the aim to make young people take an interest in European politics, provide them with the necessary opportunities to do so and enhance European citizenship. However, political reforms will not be enough to incite European thinking. It is also up to civil society actors to play a role in making young people get involved. "The EU is not brought to us intensely, so I don't feel that I need to be interested", 25-year old Sonja, a young professional in Helsinki, told us. Non-governmental institutions can help bring European affairs to citizens with more intensity and from a more neutral position.

However, every action of think tanks, youth organisations or associations related to Europe bears the danger of just reaching those that are Europhiles by default. Our journey comprised discussion rounds previously organised in cooperation with organisations like the European Youth Parliament or the Young Diplomats Forum. The discussions always provided useful insights. But they gave us a very non-representative picture of opinions and limited the impact of our project to those that were convinced pro-Europeans already. It is therefore important that non-public institutions manage to scout opinions and make an impact beyond the usual pro-European cliental. European topics must be placed where they are not usually heard. This could happen in many ways, so we would just like to name three approaches we consider both pragmatic and potentially effective.

(1) *Go where politics do not reach*. Young people can benefit from many EU-given opportunities without knowing well. Think of the possibility to incite political referenda or use the numerous exchange programmes. Displayed by the EU institutions, these opportunities often come across little exciting. Non-governmental institutions can help citizens know about their opportunities better. They should also go where European Affairs are not an everyday issue: Why do young people leave school with having heard not much or nothing about the political system of Europe?

(2) *Go beyond Brussels*. Europe is attractive by its diversity. As well as young Europeans like to get to know other European culturally, they will find it interesting to know more about the political situation of other countries. Non-governmental organisations thus shouldn't only focus on explaining EU politics, but also differences and similarities of national political systems and the relationship between national politics and Brussels.

(3) *Connect young professionals across Europe*. Different cultural, political and economic traditions across Europe are often seen as hindrances. They can also be seen as a chance to exchange best practices in any area. Non-governmental organisations could facilitate get-togethers of young teachers as well as young entrepreneurs, just to name two examples. Participants could learn about differences, similarities and opportunities in their field on a Europe-wide scale. On the other hand, non-governmental institutions could provide engage them in a discussion on how the EU is fostering best practices and where else it could do more. Like this, both sides could naturally learn from European diversity as well as define important policy fields for the future.