

## **Discussion and conclusions: challenges of European youth**

### **Fiona Pantoga-Montoto**

#### **I. Introduction: Which challenges that today's European youth will need to confront concern you the most?**

My initial response to this question was quite broad, encompassing all contexts of media censorship and a world of disinformation. Essentially, I take issue with the ease with which online platforms deem it necessary (or are motivated by external causes and motives) to filter information. In the following summarized discussion, my peers offered a more specific and personal perspective on the matter of information and censorship, as well as other challenges they feel are prevalent.

One thing that did not occur to me as I reflected on the question "Which challenges that today's European youth will need to confront concern you the most?" is something that probably differs from many past European generations. A significant amount of European youth today either have families who are not originally from Europe, or they themselves are not originally from Europe. With this in mind, it makes sense that some of the challenges that youth in Europe face, especially students, who in their nature seek places to study that might not be their native country, are seen through the lens of non-native Europeans.

As my personal response was related to free speech, the media, and information, our initial discussion centered on this and how media can be utilized during conflict to draw in viewers, create a narrative, and form subconscious beliefs in the viewers. The following is a summarized version of the discussion and is not necessarily my personal beliefs, but a mixture of the different viewpoints gathered.

#### **II. A world of misinformation**

Participants in the discussion expressed their frustration with the way we are flooded with information on social media. They stated that they felt as though they were drowning in false information and seeing the truth be interpreted in a way that was not "morally correct." One person said that seeing events and narratives be portrayed in only the way that fits with the interests of whoever owns the news outlets, media platforms, journals, etc. had become detrimental to their mental health. In response followed a discussion that questioned whether we even have the capability to define truth. When it comes to the truth, everybody likes to think that their truth is the truth, but there are layers of truth.

Along the lines of defining truth, is it possible to also define a clear "oppressor" and "oppressed" in a situation of conflict? One participant felt that when running purely on emotion, it is easy to name one side as one of the two but that when putting emotions aside, as is necessary in politics, that definition becomes blurry. In social and political movements, the narrative is often that the oppressed has the right to defend themselves against the oppressor. Our conversation naturally moved to whether violence is justified. Participants discussed the case where even if someone has the right to something, be it land, be it humanity, be it freedom, violence is still

violence. With violence comes a cycle that needs to be broken; as one side shouts words of hatred and grows up shunning the other, so goes the same for the opposition. But this cycle, participants felt, needs to be broken as growing up learning to hate leads nowhere and cannot be justified. Even on a political level, participants stated their belief that violence does not even lead to political gains.

Someone raised the question, “Is the media trying to show us violence on both sides to break the cycle?” The response was that the media dramatizes and capitalizes off of bloodshed, and participants noted that they themselves find news to be boring if it does not include violence or blood. One participant gave the example of the refugee case in Europe. By 2016, everyone in Europe was so used to and tired of the story. Even though it was still a current event, the media moved on to other stories as they lost viewers. This happens generally as well, not just alone in this isolated case. The media has the power to portray sides in a particular way, and this is not separable from the politics involved. Foreign countries, for example, have an advantage in the media coverage from their ally countries. A good narrative can heavily influence the international community’s position and proper media coverage can be essential to the gains or losses of an interested party, whether or not that coverage is representative of “the truth.” Participants noted that news outlets and journalists should be purely focused on covering facts rather than taking sides.

Here we turned to a discussion of our own role in confronting these challenges and possible solutions through addressing the following questions: If politics and emotions are or should be separate from each other, is there a truth or solution? Other than violence? If someone or an entity continues oppressing people endlessly, how do we end the cycle of violence?

Our conclusions were as follows: Breaking the cycle requires everyone sitting around a table and coming up with a solution. Violence is an inevitable response to violence, and halting it requires a choice to talk rather than fight from the beginning. However, when asked if it was the role of young people to make it right, responses were varied. One said simply, “It’s up to you. I try not to impose any burden on anybody.” At the same time, if there is a crisis, people should take a stand. This could take various forms, such as lobby groups for advocacy. A slightly less typical way of helping could be assisting in intellectual projects. For areas of conflict, creating historical archives is time consuming but equally important since often, much of the pre-existing archives are lost or destroyed. Participants warned against reactionary movements because they feel that they are not potent enough to be long-lasting and have a tendency to die out after an initial charge of energy. They felt that that route is not a route to solution, although it does have the benefit of making people aware of a situation.

### **III. Prejudice**

From the media, our conversation turned to what it was like generally living in Europe. Some feel when they are in Europe, they are undervalued and their skills and knowledge are exploited. They feel that even if they have the same qualifications as native Europeans, companies, organizations, foundations, etc. understand that young people living in Europe are in

a position where they are in need of work and opportunities. Because of this, those employers can underpay young people who do not have any alternatives to an underpaid job or internship. Even with an extraordinary resume, with fluent language skills, and with an impressive degree, the sentiment is that living in Europe is unfair in general especially for people who are not from Europe because of the higher standards they are held to than Europeans. Additionally, it should be noted that being a European living in a different European country than your own is much different from being non-European living in a European country, even if you are a long time resident and consider it your home. Someone from Denmark who does not have any German language knowledge might very well have more ease in living than someone who speaks German fluently but is originally from outside of the EU or has a non-EU passport.

With this in mind, the participants generally agreed that they feel they must overcompensate and over qualify themselves in order to receive equal opportunities, acceptance to study programs, and employment as people in the same position as they, but who happen to hold a more privileged passport. Further, participants expressed concern over future generations having to endure the same prejudices in Europe as they have and a desire and feeling of duty to make sure they will not.

On a personal level, one participant brought up their experiences with romantic relationships in Europe in relation to prejudice. They felt that finding a partner in Europe is difficult because in Europe people generally have a more individualistic mindset. In Germany one might meet new people at cultural events, but this has negative effects for people who visibly appear as non-white European. A language barrier makes finding a partner in Europe additionally difficult. People tend to prefer a partner who shares their language, as speaking a foreign language constantly is tiring and translation does not always relay communication in the most accurate way.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

All contexts of our discussion pointed to what seemed to be the greatest overlying concern- a growing divide among different groups of people. We are divided in politics, in religion, geographically and the general consensus was that talking (face to face) is the solution. "Talking" is more nuanced than the simple act of talking. It is carrying words with empathy and approaching those with opposing opinions not as the enemy, but as human beings. There is something to be said for simply being open and available for discourse.