

Report of the Meeting of May 17th 2021

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Some days ago, I gathered some friends, colleagues and neighbours to discuss our hopes and fears for the future of Europe, and the skills that my generation developed and that can be useful to ensure a better future. I invited 6 people: my colleagues and friends Arnaldo and Alice, a German international student at my university, Cornelius, my friend Adriano, who attended Oxford University and will move to London next year to work, my neighbour Irene, who attends High School, and my girlfriend Emma, who does not attend university.

To begin with the meeting, which was done on Zoom due to Covid regulations, I shared the questions of the Hans Adriaansens Student Awards, and I read my answers to each topic to start. Then, I asked if they all agreed on what I wrote and if they had different opinions about these issues.

The first one to speak was my colleague, Alice. She said she mainly agreed with what I said, but that her main concerns for the future were quite different. In fact, while my main fears regarded politics and the international role of Europe in nowadays world, she was more worried about job possibilities for young people, and the lack of youth policies in place to support students in the job market. She told us about her background, since she attended an Overseas programme to study for one year in Korea last year. In her opinion, European policies are quite anachronistic and outdated, and she fears that, with the average age increasing, the fiscal mechanism of European countries will collapse, with fewer taxpayers having to shoulder a pension system unsustainable. Still, she mentioned that the renewal of the Erasmus 2021-2027 plan (which doubled the funds to the programme) and the termination of unpaid internships give her hope for the future, but the European Union should have done a lot more. Since me and her were the only ones that were part of the Erasmus programme, we briefly shared our experience since we both thought it was crucial for our future jobs.

After Alice finished her intervention, Adriano stepped in. He partially agreed with her, although he mentioned that the EU already created several funds for students to apply to, but sometimes these opportunities are not even known by young people. To study in Oxford, in a pre-Brexit environment, he applied to an Italian scholarship funded by the EU, and he could not have afforded that opportunity without that. Therefore, the European Union already has some policies that youth can use for education and jobs, but still it is urgent to improve the regulations. Again, quoting his background, he mentioned that in the UK he had no trouble finding a job and that he already had job offers during his university years. Therefore, he concluded by saying that he agreed with Alice, and that he hopes that these policies may be implemented by the EU. Arnaldo jumped in to agree with Adriano, and also added that he was browsing job vacancies in Italy and in the EU, and he noticed that young people are not very considered in this aspect, especially in Italy. Thus, he was quite worried about his future, and they were hoping that the Union may implement some new policies in this aspect.

After this first topic, I asked my guests if anyone of them had any other worries or hopes to add. Cornelius took the floor, and stated that he agreed with my answers, but that from his standpoint, climate change is the main issue that our generation needs to face. He stated that humankind is not yet aware of the potential of this problem, and that this issue needs to be addressed now. Emma agreed with Cornelius in this regard, claiming that the next few years will be fundamental to limit global warming and its consequences. She mentioned that to achieve this it would be important to develop sustainable transports, maybe by improving public transports, making the example of the poor situation of Roman public transport (all the guests nodded at the same time on this), to reduce plastic use and to increase the percentage of recyclable materials. She

was mainly worried about the unsustainability of the fast fashion phenomenon, which highly contributes to waste production and she was hoping that this issue may be addressed by developing circular economy and increasing the proportion of second-hand clothing in the market. To the question regarding optimism, she replied that the Paris Climate Agreement, aimed at reducing greenhouse gasses of 55% by 2030, was an important opportunity to improve the current situation, and that she also approved the European strategy to achieve gender equality by 2025, hoping that this could end inequalities related to sex and gender.

Cornelius instead thought that the Paris Climate Agreement was not and was not working properly. He mentioned that it was important to increase the efforts in this sense, since several studies outlined that the signer States were not doing enough. Nonetheless, he said that he believed in our generations and younger people to show willingness and actual drive for change once we have the opportunity. He was particularly amazed by Greta Thunberg and the Fridays for Future movement, to which he participated several times. He stated that nowadays information is available to everyone, and this is causing a slowly disappearance of conservatism in positions of charge, which could ease change in the future. He also believes that our generation is more willing to base its opinions on real scientific evidence, and that we are open to dialogue, therefore he thinks that we will be able to change things for real. Alice, Arnaldo and Adriano did not agree on Cornelius' optimism.

Since I noticed that she did not express her opinion, I asked Irene if she was willing to share her ideas. She mentioned that, apart from the job issues that frightened her deeply, was gender gap. She said that it is unthinkable to her to live in a society where women earn less and are constantly harassed, and that to improve it is important to educate in schools and incentivize women hiring. Still, she believes that awareness upon these issues is rising in modern society and that schools are improving the efforts to increase information.

To conclude the meeting, I asked everyone which are the skills that characterize our generations, and if they think that our potential is overlooked in modern society. Alice, again, spoke first. She stated that skills like computer and financial literacy are the basis for our generation to thrive, and that these skills will be crucial in the future. This, united with most competencies and skills being commodified online for free, gives youth an advantage. She does not think that her potential is being overlooked, since she is part of youth organizations, and she feels like these platforms have allowed youths to advocate and contribute to causes they are passionate about (even though sometimes she felt like she was there just because "it is inclusive and can bring fresh perspectives"). Moreover, she realizes that the quality of youth proposals is often not high enough to bring real change. Therefore, it is now possible for youth to have way more impact by actually changing society, and we are not doing it.

Cornelius had a different opinion. As he mentioned earlier, he thinks that our generations developed crucial skills to dialogue, and that we are more open and tolerant than previous generations. He also definitely thinks that young people must be involved, listened and respected much more in the political discourse. We approach new problems and challenges with a fresher mind which can reveal new unthinkable solutions, especially inclusive solutions that work for all. Therefore, he thinks that we must build powerful networks of young people, that are able to make their voice heard. So far, there is still too little unification among young people, although they share many views. To sum up, he believes that young people are still only a side concern in many decisions, although most agree that they should be a considerable part of the process.

Emma shared his view. She believes that our generation is more capable of being empathetic towards the others, and thus more open. We are more interested in human rights and minorities, and that we are more willing to fight for each other. We have a more world-oriented perspective, and it is important since nowadays problems cannot be solved on a national scale. She also believes that our potential is not fully exploited, especially in Italy, and she hopes that the EU can do something to change this attitude.

Adriano agreed, and said that if that was not the case, he would have not moved to England to work. He loves Italy and he was deeply sorry to leave, but the job opportunities in our country are not incentivizing for young people, and he felt completely overlooked. Therefore, he hoped that this tendency could change in the future, even though he was not very optimistic about it. He was prepared to live all his life abroad for this problem, and I felt sorry for him.

Lastly, Irene said that this feeling of overlooking depends on the circumstances, since there are situations in which she feels powerless to contribute to society because she cannot change too much. She also said that she does not think that our generation is being overlooked more than others, since each generation has its potential to change the society in which it lives. She does not believe in the perfect generation that one day will use its best potential.

I then concluded the meeting, thanking my guests for their time and answers. To conclude, it seems to me that from this meeting several different issues emerged. Even though politicians talk about the youth as a single entity, we are many different individuals, moved by different motives and goals, and we are not the same just for being young. I was shocked by the different opinions regarding certain topics, but in a pleasant way, since I think that discussion and dialogue are crucial for the future. My guests shared their stories and their different views on these topics, and most of times we did not agree. Still, I do think that all of us understand the urgency of these times, and the need to take action to change the future. I do not take for granted that our generation has the key to solve all the world's problems, but I do think that we can bring in new ideas for a better tomorrow.