



European Youth Conference 2017

Regain or Retreat? European Youth in an Age of Uncertainty

Organizers: [Heinrich Böll Foundation Warsaw](#), [European Solidarity Centre](#), [Green European Foundation](#)

Place: [European Solidarity Centre](#) in Gdańsk, Poland (located at the founding place of the historical Polish Solidarity Movement at the former Lenin Gdańsk Shipyard)

Date: 24.-26.07.2017

Format:

The European Youth Congress is an event of the international offices of the Heinrich Böll Foundation, realized in cooperation with the Green European Foundation and local partners. In personal discussions and exchanges with political decision-makers, researchers and intellectuals as well as representatives of NGOs and activists up to 80 politically interested young people explore the living situations and perspectives of younger European generations. The programme of the event will be composed of an attractive mixture of appealing key-notes and panels with distinguished speakers and interactive workshops run by participants, seconded by colourful cultural side-events. Although topics vary each year, the focus is always on how to develop a more social and just, democratic and ecological Europe.

History:

Year	Place & Partner	Theme	Topics discussed
2013	Berlin YOUNG EUROPEAN FEDERALISTS	Europe's Future - Your Future	democratic participation, economic policies and social inclusion in the EU
2014	Thessaloniki GREEN INSTITUTE GREECE	Reclaiming Our Future	youth participation, social and creative entrepreneurship, migration and minority rights
2015	Budapest ECOPOLIS FOUNDATION	(Re)Claim Your Space in Europe	freedoms, rights and liabilities in the digital age, urban future and the future of education
2016	Belgrade SHARE FOUNDATION	Internet as a Commons and New Politics of Commoning	public opinion and infrastructure, open innovation and civic rights in a digital age

Background:

The multiple economic and value crises brought about since the 1980s as much as the disruption of the cognitive safety wall of our social consciousness of the world – television – by modern communication technologies has left behind many people in disbelief, frustration, sometimes even fear. Ever more so, as the belief in the economic fairness, social equality and democratic potential of the digital global village

has undoubtedly come to an end. The images in our smartphones seem to permanently remind us of how unpredictable the world around us appears to be. The number of people who are convinced of a lack of will or ability on the part of existing political systems to cope with these challenges is rising. All this creates the impression of a crisis of liberal democracy.

Terrorism in European heartlands and rapidly growing refugee movements, debt-based public spending and precarious working conditions that put into question future economic prospects of today's younger generations as well as an increasingly polluted planet – all these issues raise intergenerational questions concerning social responsibility, loyalty towards which kind of authorities and the value of human life. In such a situation, also growing numbers of Europeans across all ages are tempted by antagonistic worldviews, calls for police states and closed communicating circles that do not transgress the networks of immediate friends and family. Fortress Europe, dismissed as pure doom-mongering a mere 20 years ago, is potentially understood no more as an imminent danger, but as a necessary price to be paid. Parallel to taking an intellectual grasp of the social, economical and political changes in Europe we need to find suitable ways to support young people in making sense of their experiences, help them understand the increasingly fierce conflict of values, support them in giving account of their engagement and offer them practical tools to support dialog and cooperation across cultures and borders.

Guiding ideas for 2017:

In Poland we aim to discuss and work on important points of reference and processes that are shaping the worldview of engaged young Europeans, who on an every-day-basis are searching for ways to make a socially responsible, just and sustainable Europe happen – causes of and reactions to growing feelings of uncertainty, injustice and fear in EU member states. Why is it, that a rational concept like “Europe” creates such contradictory reactions, ranging from scapegoating to promises of salvation? Is what we are facing today really just another “crisis that will make the Union stronger” or is the EU beginning to drift apart? Answers to these questions shall direct us towards common grounds – offering inclusive, peaceful and human-rights-based alternatives to confrontational political strategies that inevitably one way or another lead to social conflict. The following list includes a proposal of main topics to guide the discussions, which are to be characterized by a strong focus on the various generational perspectives. The intellectual exchange of opinions in the morning of each conference day shall be accompanied by parallel workshops in the afternoon, during which participants will network, improve their skills and seek to come up with practical ideas for joint activities answering the mentioned current challenges:

- **Globalisation and the return of nationalism:** Can negotiations on TTIP and CETA be led in a way to reassure citizens of the efficient protection of their rights against corporate interest? Can there be something like the successful definition and pursuit of common interests without a convergence of standards and acceptance of shared values? Can “European solidarity” really mean and bind in the same way all member states, regardless of their history and present situation? Does the nationalist revival offer effective remedies or just distracting placebos?
- **Populist challenges to open society and the search for a new social contract:** Could populism offer a chance to establish closer links between citizens and their political representatives, claiming to execute “popular will”? Do British youth voting against Brexit and Polish youth strongly refusing to receive refugees live in the same Europe? How much participation is necessary for political elites to be receptive and far-sighted? How to rebalance the quest for freedom and security, diversity and belonging? What conditions and instruments are necessary to enable true participation and effective exchange between governments and citizens? How can digital technologies be instrumental in this process?



- **Integration and Identity vs. seclusion and phobias of difference:** Is multiculturalism the “fate” of all European societies? Has liberal universalism brought about a new wave of segregation, in which gated communities lead us to believe that other people’s life styles or social situations are so “abnormal” we have to avoid contact with them? Are European democracies in danger of losing a truly public sphere to fights between supporters of ideological purity or pragmatist approaches? Is the democratic rule of law setting certain limits to cultural difference? Do immigrants with different religions or ethnic minorities (and their naturalized children) owe “us” (i.e. the hosting/majority society) a special pledge of allegiance, a specific expression of thankfulness for their reception? Should we be grateful for diverse effects of societal transformation triggered by incomers? How can young Europeans who acted in solidarity with refugees publicly give and share a testimony of their experience, thereby setting in motion an inspiring learning process addressing the issues of dialog and conflict transformation?
- **Patriarchal symbolism and the autonomy of (wo-)men:** It is worthwhile to ask whether there is an inherent connection or correlation between the French burkini debate and the recent revival of “corporeality” in concepts of masculinity. Couldn’t it be that women have already won many emancipatory battles, but stand no chance to gain full equality? Is our way of experiencing life permanently shaped by a fundamental and seemingly insurmountable, existential difference that segregates us all in “man” or “no-man”? How can civil society successfully regain more freedom of self-expression and self-determination? What artistic/ digital/ political means could become a counterweight to patriarchal and homophobic symbolism?



All images: archive of Heinrich Böll Foundation, 2015/2016

If you are interested in further information regarding the event or you would like to participate in it, please contact our coordinator Gert Röhrborn at eyc2017@pl.boell.org no later than 30 April 2017.