

# Europe's generation of doubters



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**If students training to join Europe's elites do not believe in Europe, who will? Dominique Moïsi wonders**

**T**he contrast between the Schuman Declaration of 9 May 1950, which launched the European unification project through the Coal and Steel Community, and the fearful bid to save Greece and rescue the euro of 9 May 2010 could not be more stark.

Of course, in 1950 the Cold War was raging and recovery from the Second World War concentrated European minds. It was urgent to be imaginative – and the right people were in the right positions. Jean Monnet, who inspired the project, was pragmatic and daring. Robert Schuman, who presented the idea of unification to Europe's leaders, was animated by a deep Christian faith.

Different times, different people, different spirit. The seat of the College of Europe in Natolin, near Warsaw, is a near perfect barometer to test the morale of Europe. If the young European elites being trained there to occupy positions within the EU's institutions no longer believe in the EU's future, something is really wrong. If they do not believe in Europe, who will?

On the Natolin campus, post-graduate students, representing more than 30 nationalities, live in what they often describe as a 'golden cage'. They interact (or should) to become what many may already have been prior to their arrival: 'Europeans'. At least, this is the way things were and should be.

But, even in this uniquely protected environment, Europe is no longer the cause it once was. Students tend to group themselves by nationalities more than in the past, as if they wanted familiar reassurances against the uncertainties of the present and the future.

When I started teaching in Natolin in 2002, all the college's students were infused with the hopes stemming from the EU's enlargement to eastern Europe. They prepared for inclusion of eight former communist countries (as well as Cyprus and Malta) with almost quasi-religious fervour. Students from 'Old Europe' were energised by the idealism and confidence emanating from their Polish, Czech, Estonian and fellow pupils from other parts of

'New Europe'. They all seemed full of optimism.

The will to transcend the murderous trauma in the Balkans was also present. Watching students from Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia confront their memories of the wars, 'European students' had first-hand experience of what true 'reconciliation' meant and what the rules of the game were in the greatest success the EU had known – transcending the Cold War and nationalist animosities.

On 1 May 2004, I celebrated EU enlargement with my students. We embraced each other under the blue flag. Of course, not everyone beyond the campus shared this enthusiasm, especially not everyone in Old Europe, which often seemed to be accomplishing its 'historical duty' with considerable reluctance. Looking back, it is ironic to compare the relative strength of central Europe, behind a strong Poland, to the extreme vulnerability of southern Europe, behind Greece.

Nowadays, the 'culture of doubt' among students from Old Europe seems to prevail over what was once the pragmatic confidence of students from New Europe. It is no longer the 'good wind' from the east, but the 'bad

wind' from the EU's south and parts of its west that carries the day.

Many students, if not the majority, are no longer on campus because they 'believe' in Europe, but because they are full of doubts as to their capacity to find a job. They wish to acquire an additional diploma, even though they are already overqualified. They are, above all, gaining time.

Asked not about their motivations, but about their identities, the students – with the exception of the Germans – do not spontaneously perceive themselves as Europeans first. They listen with sympathy, sometimes even with emotion, to the testimonies of the generation for whom Europe was synonymous with the ideal of reconciliation and reconstruction. But they desperately need a new narrative. The Union's founding story is not their story, but the story of their parents or grandparents. They do not ask themselves what they can do for Europe, but what Europe can do for their jobs and salaries. And they are more dubious than confident.

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