



SPEECH | 25 October 2018

It is your Europe – make your voice heard

Visit to the College of Europe, Natolin Campus

Natolin, 25 October 2018

- Check against delivery -

Vice-rector, your excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, dear students,

It is a pleasure for me to be here today. I am particularly happy to meet with so many young students, and discuss the future of our Union, the role young people have in shaping it – and how the EU can support you even better.

All of you have worked tremendously hard to be at such a prestigious place of study. Not only are you learning from some of Europe's most accomplished lecturers and professors, you have great opportunities to meet and learn from young people across Europe and further afield – every day.

I hope that this experience is helping you to get to know more about countries and cultures different to your own. At a time when European unity is fragile, you can be excellent role models for how people from different places and backgrounds can come together. You can become ambassadors of the values and principles that make Europe such a wonderful place: openness, mutual understanding and respect, and a readiness to come together to build a better future. Europe needs people who build bridges between, and within communities; between Member States; between East and West, North and South. And who better to build these bridges than young people like yourselves?

Many – if not all of you – will soon be in pivotal positions be in the private or public sectors. I hope that your positive experiences with each other guide you in the important decision you will soon make about your future.

Dear friends,

Young people are at the very top of the EU's agenda. We know that your generation has faced unprecedented difficulties with many aspects of life – whether in gaining access to high quality, relevant education, finding fulfilling work, or one's own place to live. And despite the economy's recovery, far too many young people are still facing challenges.

We will all need to work together to create better conditions for young people. There are no simple solutions, and it will take time. I believe that the EU has an important role to play in this – by cooperating with Member States on bold policies and through our financial programmes.

Responding to a call from EU Leaders for more ambition in the area of education, we are now working hard with Member States to build a true European Education Area by 2025. This will be a space in which learning and knowledge will no longer be hampered by borders, where learning languages and going abroad to study, learn and live will be the norm. I believe that this is crucial for Europe – only by moving closer together will we preserve and strengthen our abilities to innovate, create cohesive societies and compete on the world stage.

One central part of the European Education Area that you might be particularly interested in is our work on 'European Universities'. These will be reinforced alliances between higher education institutions, involving joint teaching programmes at Bachelor, Master and Doctorate levels. By 2024, we want to have at least 20 of these European Universities. These should focus on excellence, while also being geographically inclusive.

Students will be able to benefit from many more opportunities to learn and train than they could in any individual university. They will have a broader choice of courses or modules, and they will benefit from innovative models of learning and training in different countries and across disciplines.

To advance this important project, the Commission is about to launch a call for proposals from interested universities, and the first pilots to build these European Universities will start in September 2019.

This is only a snapshot of what we do in education. And we do not stop with formal learning – we also support other forms of education, whether it is through volunteering, youth work, cultural projects or sport clubs.

All this needs to be backed by adequate funding. The Commission's proposal for the EU's next long-term budget after 2020 is very clear: we believe in Europe's youth, and we want to invest much more in it. That is why we are seeking to significantly raise the budget for the Erasmus programme and for the European Solidarity Corps – a new initiative that creates opportunities for young people like you to support people and communities in need, gaining valuable personal experiences and important competences in the process. Of course, the European Council and Parliament will still need to agree with the budget increases we have proposed – but our ambition is very clear.

And why have we focused on Erasmus?

For me, Erasmus is a living example of how Europeans have united in overcoming the painful divisions of the Cold War. This programme is an outstanding example of how the EU can offer young people opportunities that have a positive impact on their lives. I am sure that many of you

know it from experience. Participants not only learn valuable skills for the workplace and life in general, they experience what it feels like to be European.

With double the budget – EUR 30 billion for 2021 to 2027 – we will be able to make Erasmus even bigger and better than it already is. We aim to lift the number of those benefiting to 12 million people – three times as many participants as under the current programme. Importantly, we also want to make Erasmus more inclusive, enabling especially those with fewer means to participate.

Erasmus will also have some new elements. One of them is DiscoverEU. Already this summer, in the pilot phase, we awarded travel passes to 15,000 18-year-olds so that they could explore and discover Europe. We will be launching a second round in November, so please tell your 18-year-old brother, sister, friend or neighbour to keep their eyes on the European Youth Portal and our social media.

Finally, I would like to talk about next year's European Parliament elections. You are in a privileged position: you have an in-depth understanding of the EU - of its values, how it functions, and the importance of the EU in our everyday lives.

But not everybody is as privileged as you are. Please use your knowledge and passion for the European Union to go into your communities and persuade friends, family and neighbours to vote. Sharing articles on social media will only go so far – the best way to persuade people is through human contact – conversations at the dinner table or over a beer with friends. So get involved! Become advocates of the European Union.

Why is this so important? Because young people seem to be distancing themselves from these democratic processes. At the last European Parliament elections, only 28% of those between 18 and 24 cast their vote. Let us work together to increase this figure.

Voting means having a say on a vast array of issues that matter to you, such as tackling climate change, funding Erasmus studies abroad and fighting youth unemployment. Voting means taking responsibility for shaping the Europe of tomorrow. The future is yours – I urge you to seize this opportunity to help us build it together.

Thank you.
