

25th EEAC Annual Conference – 11-13 October 2017, Maastricht

Essay by the youth representatives from Germany: Dominik Naab and Jasmin Burgermeister

As European citizens being born, raised and now based in Germany and representing therefore Germany at this meeting, we, Dominik Naab and Jasmin Burgermeister, are happy to share with you an outline of our thoughts concerning the sustainable development of Europe and the European Union.

We would like to state first the following: there is Europe 'ourselves' and there is Europe and the world. To make it clear at the very beginning, a sustainable Europe is only possible if we put down our eurocentric glasses and widen our view to Europe's responsibility at a global scale. This awareness should be present in all Europeans' minds whenever a decision is made.

But how should a fully sustainable Europe thus look like in 2030? You ask us for our opinion, we give you our vision: When we get up in the morning on a day of the year 2030, somewhere in Europe, we use first our plastic-free toothbrush, get then a coffee made out of beans that have been picked by a woman or man who works under decent conditions and can support her or his family with the money they earn (plastic free and fair traded goods have become a general standard in all (online) supermarkets), we then go to our workplace, where women and men who do the same job are paid equally, where labour leasing is banned and people are only laughing about this relict from an unsustainable former world. Our education system provides equal opportunities and permits everyone no matter what socio-economic (gender, parents' education, religion or ethnicity) background she or he has, to develop skills and to strive for a position she or he feels made for. Women in STEM, in leading positions in private as well as in public sector are as usual as men at home caring for children and family members. Not only thanks to digitalization we managed to ameliorate our work-life balance dramatically. The 20 hours week is guaranteed by law, which lets us invest more time in free time activities and social and political commitment. Through all this also our general physical and mental health is significantly improved. We live in an apartment, which we can afford with the salary we gain, and so can all others of our generation. We live in a city – not outside in suburbs – which is easily accessible for everyone. Public transport is free and interconnected. Bikes, shared vehicles such as buses and metros, as well as autonomous and shared cars get their power from a nuclear free and carbon free energy system. No private car traffic is permitted in the city center anymore. Urban layout focuses on pedestrians and bicycles instead of cars -the air is clean and healthy. Also, all domestic flights are forbidden by law. When coming back home at a winter night (and real European winters still exist because we managed to limit climate change to a 2 degree level), we don't feel guilty anymore when using the heater because we are able heat up our home by using renewable energies. All in all, also our neighbours believe in democracy again and our country, the European Union, has finally recured...

We could go on with this imagery for hours, covering all urgent developments that need to be made and wouldn't still have finished. But we want to highlight now some severals which are, as we think, underrepresented in the discussion about a sustainable development of Europe. Whereas we do understand the 2030 Agenda as a holistic approach whose goals should not be prioritized and where all world regions need to take ownership on all different seventeen SGDs, we want to flag, however, three

challenges that need to be addressed in a more exhaustive way by European countries in particular.

First and foremost, we perceive social inequality among different European countries as well as within European countries themselves as one of the most pressing issues of our times. Neoliberalism and century long unregulated globalization have led to this situation. Social inequality among different countries of the European Union (from West to East and from North to South) for instance, has as one consequence provoked Europe-wide denial of a further European integration and the European idea itself. Social inequality within several countries has created frustration towards higher wage and thereby social 'classes', hatred against the 'establishment' and last but not least it has precipitated a renunciation of our societal and political system by many of those people most affected by inequalities. Also, the fact that populism has unsettled our political landscapes in the last years needs to be seen as rooted in these increased social inequalities. By not intending to simplify the causal chains concerning the highly complex effects of social inequality, we still believe though that these circumstances will not only limit but possibly even hinder sustainable development within the EU.

Europe has thus an advanced responsibility in implementing SDG 10 of the 2030 Agenda. Measures we propose are a Europe-wide minimum wage of 9 Euro (in the EU) as well as the mutualization of social policies in the European Union. If the EU takes its attempts seriously to develop further from an only economic partnership to a value based strong federation, this is the next logical step to take in the shortest delays.

Furthermore, social peace and progress is only to realize if special attention will be given to SDG 5. Gender Equality can never been left apart when talking about the dilution of inequality within societies. Gaps between genders such as the gender pay gap and the gender care gap may no longer be tolerated and immediate action is crucial in order to achieve a sustainable Europe by 2030. One measure we would like to see implemented is a legally binding quota all over Europe of women in boards and management positions of all businesses over 100 employees (around 40 %) as well as in Public Service (around 50%). Whereas the actual percentage for each country needs to be negotiated with employers and trade unions and all other relevant stakeholders (such as youth organizations) at a national level taking into account specific national circumstances, we are convinced that a EU Directive will facilitate this progress and needs therefore to be developed as soon as possible.

Secondly, we recognize, especially when meeting with youth and school children, the urgent necessity of an improved and strengthened Education for Sustainable Development - which leads us to mention this issues as second relevant in this essay.

The transfer of knowledge about sustainable actions and how to behave accordingly in daily life must be integrated in every school subject. As we know, it is already a huge challenge to change the 16 different state school curriculums in federal Germany but we are also proponents of the idea that Education for Sustainable Development is a key factor for any positive change. Content concerning a sustainable and responsible lifestyle needs therefore be taught to each student all over Europe. We need to start creating an awareness of everyone's responsibility as well as everyone's possibilities to make differences life-long with a beginning at a very early age. Moreover, non-formal education plays a tremendous role in achieving this goal. More public funds need therefore to be invested in non-formal education projects as

they let grow young conscientious citizens.

Thirdly, we identify the urgent need of a strengthened European Integration in order to achieve real sustainability by 2030 Europe-wide. We think, it needs more boldness in policy making. In particular, young people who are still far too few decision- and policy-makers themselves, believe in and support the European idea wholeheartedly. We are convinced hence, that only more young people in parliaments and in offices will make progressive steps in this direction. In these times, we strongly believe that we need courageous initiatives such as handing over competences in the foreign, development and finance policies from the national state to the EU. In addition, though, we also acknowledge the responsibility by EU institutions themselves. Both the European Parliament as well as the European Commission need to declare sustainable development as their main guiding principle in all the work they do.

After this all, and we only raised the issues that need explicitly much more attention while not neglecting so many others, we remain of the conviction that all these challenges can only be tackled when proactively including youth. Young people, however, may not be understood as a homogenous group of people but as some highly divers generations. In order to leave no one behind, as the 2030 agenda obliges us, the collaboration with youth organization who do namely represent this variety of young people in Europe, is the key to the solutions of all challenges ahead of us.