

INTERFACE | February 2020

Solidarity Tour: youth and the EU



EUROPE TOMORROW

Is Europe working for young people? Are political decision makers taking their concerns into account? Does the European Single Market make it easier for them to enter the job market? Despite their differences, can Europe draw them together around common values? In 2019, Confrontations Europe organised the Solidarity Tour with the support of the European Commission to listen to and educate young people from different European countries, and give them an opportunity to talk to each other about creating and taking ownership of a new European Project for the future. For many young people, the European Union is a distant and opaque institution with ill-defined powers, which is out of touch with citizens' everyday lives. We brought together thirty or so youngsters from disadvantaged areas in eight different countries, and showed them that, if they stripped away the veneer of nationality, they would find people not so different to themselves, with similar concerns about training, employment, mobility, environmental protection, immigration, etc. They were able to share their ideas and discuss and develop proposals for the future. At each of the seven legs of the tour, the young people were given a chance to defend their project for Europe and to discuss it with local and European decision makers to make sure it is put in place. Europe has a strong future ahead if it commits, right now, to considering the aspirations of its youngest citizens.

Patrick STARKMAN, Director General of Confrontations Europe

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YOUNG PEOPLE AND EUROPE: UNITED THROUGH CULTURE

IRENA BILIC | *Coordinator of the Solidarity Tour, founder and executive director of the "L'Europe autour de l'Europe" (Europe by Europe) festival*

The purpose of the Solidarity project was to bring young Europeans from seven different countries together on a 'Tour' of six capital cities, each leg of which was woven through with cultural activities and events. How can we connect and bond with each other or make sense of the world around us without wandering through a museum of archaeology or history, talking about a documentary we have seen, or sharing a meal together? At every stage of the tour, organiser Irena Bilic managed to provide insight and understanding into what makes people tick in countries that many of the youngsters were visiting for the first time.

WHEN IT COMES TO CULTURE, ALL COUNTRIES ARE EQUAL

Why did we decide to organise the Solidarity Tour around **visits to museums and libraries, film screenings and guided walks through cities and to places of historical interest**? Because it is hard to deny that European culture exists. We need only think about the great writers who are now part of all our lives (Bodler, Shakespeare, Cervantes and Dostoevsky among others), of Italian and German opera, the masterpieces of national cinema that make up our common European heritage, the Renaissance, the ancient civilisation of Greece, etc. This cultural project was all the more justified by the disheartening words of writer and journalist **Frédéric Martel**: 'Europeans have little interest in the culture of countries other than their own, and neither intellectuals, nor the media (newspapers rarely report on the cultural life of their neighbours), nor the European institutions (just 0.1% of the Union's total budget is allocated to the "Europe of culture") have managed to create a genuine desire for a European culture.'

But it is not just culture that fails to arouse our interest. We are not interested in our neighbours at all, neither their lives, nor their language, nor their concerns. So, how can we really call ourselves European?

I created a cultural programme as a way of encouraging young Europeans to connect with each other. It was designed to inform, instruct, fascinate, surprise and intrigue those taking part in the Solidarity Tour, and to confront them with the **cultural, sociological, historical and artistic reality of others**.

If there was one thing that really encouraged me and made my task easier, it was the knowledge that all countries are equal when it comes to culture. All over Europe, there are men and women who have won Nobel Prizes in the arts and sciences, and there are star dancers, artists and musicians. The European civilisation gives talent the opportunity to flourish and has always, and still does, share much of that talent worldwide.

The Solidarity Tour was intended to be an **educational project**. The **Warsaw Rising Museum** enables visitors to identify with the Warsaw residents who were trapped under the bombs in 1944, shortly before the city was completely destroyed – you get to see the Second World War, or any war for that matter, through the eyes of the people who were there. You are shocked by your own ignorance; you want to understand and therefore to learn. When you visit the Church of the Holy Cross in Warsaw, you are intrigued by the bond that developed between a priest and a worker's union, with the backing of an entire people. You also learn that the heart of one of Europe's most illustrious and well-loved composers, **Frédéric Chopin** (who was of French and Polish descent) was laid to rest there.

At the **Nikola Tesla Museum in Belgrade**, which is still often confused with another eastern European capital (but has kept its name despite all that has happened since the fall of the Berlin Wall), you discover the work and the European journey of one of the greatest minds in the modern era, an authentic Renaissance thinker who was an influential figure in sustainable development: Nikola Tesla, an American inventor and engineer of Serbian descent, widely known for his prominent role in the development and adoption of alternating current in transport and electricity distribution. You also learn that Serbia lost a third of its male population during the Great War,

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which makes you think about your own country's experience, and about the terrible tragedies that befell Europe in the twentieth century. And you wonder how it is possible to 'miraculously' unite Europe, and what its future will be.

IN BUDAPEST ET IN ATHENS, DOCUMENTARY FILMS ON CURRENT ISSUES

We visited the **Robert Capa Contemporary Photography Centre** in **Budapest**, the birthplace of the pioneering reporter and journalist who covered five major conflicts: the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), the Chinese war of resistance against Japan (1938), the Second World War across Europe (1941-1945), the first Arab-Israeli War (1948) and the Indochina War (1954). Robert Capa took it right down to the wire. On 25 May 1954, when he was covering the Indochina War, he stepped on a landmine and was killed outright.

And in Greece, the tour of the **National Archaeological Museum** in **Athens** takes you on a journey back in time. You revisit the foundations of European civilisation, its philosophers, sculptures, architects and writers, citizens who invented and practised the democracy that we now claim to adhere to, and that we must constantly reinvent (or else?). Ancient Greece can help us put things (back) into perspective. In Athens, where the topic of discussion was migration, the group also visited a refugee centre for unaccompanied minors of various nationalities, including Afghans and Syrians, as well as young people from Sub-Saharan Africa. Foreigners – 'barbarians' – also made their way to the shores of Ancient Greece. There are lessons to be learned from that.

The two films screened at the **French Institute in Budapest** and the **Greek Film Archive** in Athens discussed the topics addressed at the seminars. The docufilm *Les Règles du Jeu*, which was produced by **Claudine Bories** and **Patrice Chagnard**, follows the fortunes of three young jobseekers and discusses the integration of young people into the labour market. In Athens, the screening of the documentary *Milad – my planet* by **Menelaos Karamaghliolis**, which investigates the fate of asylum seekers arriving in Europe, provided an opportunity for young Europeans, refugees and the director to talk about the issue of migration.

In **Prague**, which is an architectural masterpiece in itself and survived the destruction wrought during our century of tragedy, the young people visited the Karel Zeman Museum. A brilliant film director often regarded as the successor to Méliès, Zeman directed the science fiction film *Journey to the Beginning of Time*. Karel Zeman was not only at the forefront of numerous trends in contemporary cinema, he was also one of the greatest masters of animated film and a huge source of inspiration to George Lucas.

In **Paris**, we visited two unique 'cultural' venues: the **Cité internationale universitaire de Paris** and the **Bibliothèque publique d'information Centre Pompidou**. The former, with its 40 national houses (or residences) has been hosting students and researchers from all over the world for almost a century; the latter is a reading, learning and research hub open to everyone. These two venues embody the very best of what the twentieth century achieved in terms of democratising and sharing knowledge and culture – the possibility for everyone to access culture.

A POLICY OF CIVILISATIONAL AND CULTURAL REGENERATION

That is the purpose of a cultural programme: to enable young people to ask questions, think, search and get involved. Also, as another remarkable European – the sociologist and philosopher **Edgar Morin** – has pointed out: 'There is still one thing that can pave the way to a politically united Europe and thus help fill the political vacuum, and that is the environmental question. Europe could develop a common policy to safeguard natural environments, settings and quality of life; a policy of civilisational and cultural regeneration to replace more with better.' From this perspective – the perspective of Edgar Morin – culture is part of the global environmental project! And we all have an opportunity to play our part.

All of the participants in the Solidarity Tour participated actively in the film screenings and the visits to museums and historical places, which inspired discussions about the culture of others; they were also immersed in **linguistic, gastronomic and musical experiences**, and had the opportunity to explore 'local' lifestyles at each of the six European legs of the tour.

The Solidarity Tour is proof in itself that Europe's future lies in education.

SOLIDARITY TOUR, GIVING YOUNG EUROPEANS A VOICE

LORÈNE WEBER | Policy officer for Youth, Confrontations Europe

Throughout the year 2019, Confrontations Europe conducted a transnational and youth-oriented project: the Solidarity Tour. Young Europeans, representing eight nationalities, met and exchanged during participative and intercultural seminars in six European countries, to issue recommendations and discover their shared history.

FROM LILLE TO BELGRADE: ENGAGING YOUNG EUROPEANS INTO A EUROPEAN DEBATE

Integration in the labour market, social Europe, regional and international mobility, immigration and asylum, values of the European Union, democracy... These topical issues were debated all year round, during regular meetings between young European citizens. Coming from **Germany, Belgium, France, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic** and **Serbia**, these young people of various backgrounds (high school students, university students, jobseekers, artists, independents...), sometimes disadvantaged ones, had the opportunity to share experiences, debate and issue recommendations on these subjects of importance, both for their own future and the European Union.

The debate was not restricted to the young participants and their facilitators. After exchanging within workshops and sharing their conclusions in front of the other groups, they had the opportunity, at each seminar, to present their recommendations in front of a panel of experts. Representatives of the **European Commission**, of the **European Parliament** and of **Erasmus+** in the different countries, local and national **decision-makers**, **NGO** or **trade union** representatives took part in the exercise of listening what young people had to say and reacting to their proposals. A “bottom-up” approach, far from a lecture, which committed in enhancing young people’s voices.

Integration in the labour market and **social rights** in Europe triggered genuine concerns as well as a certain feeling of injustice and inequality. The participants, especially from Eastern Europe and Greece, stressed the need to make **social standards converge in Europe**, in particular regarding social

security, minimum wage or working conditions (weekly working hours, undeclared work...) between the Member States. The Polish, Hungarian and Serbian participants in particular, cited that numerous workers from their countries move to Germany for example, and that they consider this possibility themselves, to benefit from better living and working conditions. These remarks appeared from the first kick-off seminar in Lille, and were developed in Warsaw, Prague and Budapest.

In Prague, Budapest and Belgrade, where the EU’s **democratic values** and the perspective of **enlargement** were debated, the participants expressed quite clearly that joining the EU requires the respect of democratic standards, but that it should also apply to the Member States, and that real sanctions should be taken if the EU’s values were not respected.

A FOCUS ON MIGRATION

In Athens, where young people worked on **asylum** and **immigration** issues, they had the opportunity to visit a shelter for unaccompanied minors, managed by the Greek association ARSIS, and they exchanged with refugees, asylum seekers and representatives of the UNHCR and Doctors Without Borders. These meetings allowed to put faces and stories on the statistics surrounding migration issues, to meet actors on the ground, and to go beyond media and political rhetorics. Numerous participants, in particular the Greek ones, advocated for an **asylum and immigration policy managed at the European level**, with a fair distribution system between the Member States, ensuring decent living conditions to the asylum seekers, and respecting human rights.

A real need and **will to be informed on European matters** also emerged. In Prague, Budapest or Belgrade, the participants proposed the implementation of **European civic education** classes in all Member States, in primary and secondary

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schools, to provide citizens with knowledge on the functioning of the EU and on the history of European integration. This would develop a feeling of European belonging and citizenship, and would give (young) citizens the will to vote in the European elections.

Likewise, **Erasmus** was not unknown from the participants, but most of them (in particular apprentices) lacked the necessary opportunities to fulfill a mobility project. The participants, from all countries, insisted on the necessity for mobility programmes such as Erasmus+ to be expanded beyond universities, especially to technical and vocational schools, teachers, and rural areas.

DISCOVERING EUROPE'S SHARED HISTORY: PILLAR OF A FEELING OF A EUROPEAN BELONGING

In parallel to these participative workshops, the Solidarity Tour included a **cultural programme**, which allowed the young participants to discover the history and culture of the different countries visited, but also Europe's shared history and culture. The different museums, film screenings and historical centres contributed to the emergence of a feeling of European belonging, through an awareness of what unites us as Europeans, and the necessity to preserve a hard-won peace and cooperation.

Our partners in the different cities played a crucial role in the elaboration of this cultural programme: **Solidarnosc** in Warsaw, **EUROPEUM Institute** in Prague, the **French Institute** of Budapest, **ARSIS** and the **Greek Film Archive** in Athens, the **secondary school of shipping, shipbuilding and hydrobuilding** in Belgrade, the **House of Portugal – André de Gouveia** and the **Cité Internationale Universitaire** in Paris... Without these essential European partnerships, the Solidarity Tour could not have taken shape.

A FINAL CONFERENCE TO CONCLUDE THE PROJECT

The project's final conference was not a mere presentation event, during which the young participants, after being actors of the project for

almost a year, would have only been "spectators in the back row". The "**bottom-up**" model chosen for the seminars was then reproduced, at a larger scale, for the final conference.

Participants from the "Solidarity group" were gathered with other young people, living in Paris agglomeration and coming from **vocational high schools** and **associations**. Within participative workshops, they worked together on the four main topics of the Solidarity Tour: **integration in the labour market, mobility, asylum and immigration, and democracy**.

The Representation of the **European Commission** in France, the **European Parliament's** Liaison Office in France (and their "**Ambassador School**" programme), an **MEP**, the **counsellor of Paris** in charge of European affairs, **French MPs** from the **European affairs committee**, the **House of Portugal** and the **Cité Internationale Universitaire**, the **French-German Youth Office (OFAJ/DFJW)**, the **association AFEV**, the **Young Europeans France** and the **translation school ESIT** took part in this French-English bilingual event.

This conference was the occasion, for all these young people having different experiences and backgrounds, to issue their recommendations and to exchange with a panel of speakers **prone to spread their message**. The occasion, as well, to discover a unique place: the Cité Internationale Universitaire in Paris, where around 6000 students, researchers, artists and athletes from all over the world live together, in 40 houses representing more than 140 different nationalities.

If this conference concluded the Solidarity Tour's "physical" events, the project's outcomes do not end here. **Confrontations Europe** published a **methodology guide** and a **manifesto**, and will keep advocate for young people's voices in its future activities. With the Conference on the Future of Europe starting next May, a window of opportunity is open to bring the recommendations of the Solidarity Tour's young participants towards European decision-makers.

Youth recommendations (1/2)

Professional integration and social Europe	
<p>1. Harmonise social standards (minimum wage, welfare, statutory working time, etc.) and taxation (corporate tax) across Europe to reduce inequality between workers and prevent social and fiscal dumping between Member States.</p> <p>2. Realign education and training programmes with labour market realities and employer expectations, for example by increasing the share of practical experience in relation to theoretical knowledge.</p>	<p>3. Recognise the value of vocational courses and apprenticeships, especially in areas where there is a shortage of labour.</p> <p>4. Make unpaid work experience illegal.</p> <p>5. Increase the value of charity work/volunteering in the eyes of recruiters by developing national and European volunteer programmes (civic service schemes, European voluntary service, European solidarity corps, etc.).</p>
Asylum and immigration	
<p>1. Develop an EU-coordinated asylum and immigration policy under which asylum seekers are distributed fairly and equitably between the Member States, given that the Dublin Regulation is not working.</p> <p>2. Increase access to state education for minor asylum seekers, bearing in mind that in some EU Member States the children of asylum seekers are not always provided with schooling.</p> <p>3. Give adult asylum seekers access to training and apprenticeship centres.</p>	<p>4. Implement a reception policy that preserves the dignity of migrants, complies with human rights standards and ensures decent living and hygiene conditions in camps and holding centres.</p> <p>5. Give special attention to the situation of unaccompanied minors, particularly their safety, accommodation and education.</p> <p>6. Improve and simplify asylum application and granting procedures.</p> <p>7. Organise opportunities for discussion and dialogue between migrants and local populations to increase mutual understanding and facilitate the cultural and social integration of the newcomers.</p>

Youth recommendations (2/2)

Regional and international mobility	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Extend the Erasmus+ programme to include not only universities but also apprenticeship and vocational training centres. 2. Improve access to training in rural and outlying areas, for example by organising guidance forums (training, careers, mobility, etc.). 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Increase the number of foreign language courses taught in schools. 4. Diversify and increase the range of mobility grants available to allow more young people to take part in international exchanges, including internships and apprenticeships.
Democracy and values of the European Union	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Promote a stronger sense of European identity and citizenship, and thus make (young) people want to vote in European elections. 2. Teach European civics in primary and secondary schools in every Member State so that citizens understand how the EU works and what its values are, and are familiar with the history of European integration. 3. Create an independent European media organisation that is accessible in all the Member States and in all EU languages. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Enforce compliance with the EU's democratic standards and values, not only for candidate countries but also for existing Member States, and impose strong sanctions against countries that break the rules. 5. Organise awareness campaigns to prevent discrimination against certain minorities and nationalities. 6. In the Balkans in particular, promote regional economic, democratic and cultural cooperation in parallel to the EU accession process (Serbia, North Macedonia, Albania, Kosovo, etc.).

Sebastian, Poland

I think the Solidarity Tour is a very good idea because it has given young people from different countries the chance to exchange political views, talk about important issues like immigration and share their experiences, depending on where they are from.

Saji, Belgium

I thought the debates during the Solidarity Tour were very informative. We discussed various topics related to the European Union, and I think the main advantage of the project was that it gave us the chance to share and compare our views, and even to forge new opinions on the topics discussed. I learned a lot about the political situation in different European countries, which is something I have never had the chance to do before. I think that the time we spent together is a key factor in finding potential solutions to current issues: the most important thing that the project taught us was how to reshape our views by talking with others.

Hubert, Poland

I come from a small town near Poznań and I work in a car manufacturing company. The Solidarity Tour was a very important event in my life. I learned a lot myself, but the other participants taught me a lot too. Learning about other cultures and discovering what life is like in other countries was an important eye-opener for me. The workshops were all very important because they were an opportunity to connect with other participants and talk about the problems of one specific country. I will certainly never forget any of those moments.

Michaela, Czech Republic

Meeting young people from different countries was an incredible opportunity for me. During the project, I learned a lot of interesting things about political issues in the European Union. I got to know other cultures and see how people live in other countries. It was also good for my English. I loved taking part in the project and will recommend it to those around me.

Harrison, Hungary

During the Solidarity Tour, I learned a lot from the various people I met in different countries. It gave me an opportunity to talk to people of other nationalities and backgrounds. I learned a lot about their political, economic and cultural views, and about many European and global challenges. It also gave me a chance to talk to people of my own age, especially in Belgrade, and to find out what they think about the country where they live, and how they feel about what they have to do to succeed in life. I'm very grateful to have been selected for the project.

Milosz, Poland

The Solidarity Tour was a tremendous experience and challenge for me. Visiting so many different countries and learning about their culture and lifestyle was very interesting. It was a very rewarding experience to meet new people and learn about the problems in their countries, etc. I really loved it!

Jeremy, France

I got a lot out of the Solidarity project, especially the chance to hear different views, travel around Europe, and take part in cultural debates and historical tours. It gave me a greater awareness and understanding of Europe and current issues.

Jakub, Poland

The Solidarity Tour was an incredible opportunity to meet new people, explore other cultures and listen to different views about the challenges and problems facing Europe today. Hearing different views helps us to understand each other better. I have a better understanding of what people in other countries think about very important matters concerning Europe and the EU. I think this project was an excellent idea and a very important initiative for young people. I'm very grateful to have been able to take part.

Bori, Hungary

The Solidarity Tour was a cultural and conversational adventure, during which I explored new places and heard new views and ideas. To me, it was more than just an interesting project; I also made some wonderful friends. We were like family, and we spoke at least seven languages between us. It also broadened my mind and, sure, even though we came from different countries and had different political opinions, we all wanted the same thing: to make the world a better place.

PARTNERS' TESTIMONIALS

Mihajlo, Secondary School of Shipping, Shipbuilding and Hydrobuilding, Serbia

As an art teacher and guidance counsellor in Belgrade, I saw the Solidarity Tour as an opportunity to involve vocational school students – facing various professional challenges, opportunities and obstacles – in discussions about issues that concern or will concern them directly (labour market integration, mobility, the future of the EU, democratic participation, immigration, formal and informal education, etc.). The project gave the students an opportunity to improve their social and interpersonal skills and their understanding of different cultures by meeting young people from other countries and sharing their experiences, ideas and expectations with them, as well as with various associations and experts. After the very first seminar in Warsaw, my students told me that the experience had given them a greater sense of maturity. The seminar in Belgrade was also a powerful experience. A group of my students, aged from 15 to 19, discussed European integration with young people from six other countries. As a teacher, I was impressed by the strength of their feelings, their eagerness to share their personal experiences, discuss the position of Serbia between the EU and Russia, talk about the political environment, the media, the country's past, present and future... and by how much it all means to them.

Alexandra, EUROPEUM, Czech Republic

I'm a 23-year-old student and I work for EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy, one of the partners in the Solidarity Tour. I am Slovakian but I live in Prague in the Czech Republic, and I'm the leader of the group of Czech participants in the project. I really loved this project and the idea behind it. It gave the young people a fantastic opportunity to discuss the challenges facing Europe today. We were fortunate to be able to travel to different countries, meet new people, explore other cultures and make new friends. The Czech participants are delighted with the experience; they have improved their English considerably, and very much enjoyed the project. Personally, I thought it was a great initiative; it allowed young people of different nationalities to talk about pressing issues, share their views and travel to different countries.

Mateusz, NSZZ Solidarnosc, Poland

The Solidarity Tour is a unique, wonderful and ingenious project: visiting several European cities to discuss issues of great importance to the younger generation is a really interesting approach. NSZZ Solidarnosc did not hesitate for long before joining the adventure. We chose participants who were able to attend all the seminars because we thought it would have a positive effect not only on them, but also on Solidarnosc. We were right. The participants improved their knowledge and skills at every stage of the project. The Warsaw seminar, which I attended, was a big success. Primarily because the participants were young people from vocational schools who had not yet been confronted with employment and trade union issues. These young people told us they had learned a lot from the meeting and the debates. Participating in the project and working together to promote European solidarity was definitely a very worthwhile experience.