

Youth in Europe: European, democratic – but critical

TUI Foundation presents latest youth study in Berlin

Today, the TUI Foundation presented its latest youth study in Berlin. Here are some of the key findings:

- Young people in Europe have internalised and appreciate the achievements and values of the European Union (EU) and democracy. At the same time, they recognise clear weaknesses and problems.
- More than half of young Europeans think that their country's membership of the EU is "a good thing". 39 per cent say that links between EU countries should be closer.
- Elections and demonstrations are the most important means for young EU citizens to exert political influence.
- However, only just under a fifth feel strongly or very strongly represented by their own country's parliament and by the EU Parliament.
- Young people see migration as the most important problem facing the EU, ahead of climate change.
- The 16 to 26-year-olds see freedom of travel as the EU's most important achievement.

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In order to better understand the world, identity(ies) and attitudes of young Europeans towards Europe, the TUI Foundation has been commissioning the international opinion research institute YouGov to conduct annual surveys of young people since 2017 – this year, almost 6,000 young people aged 16 to 26 were surveyed online in France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland and Spain.

Thomas Ellerbeck, Chairman of the Foundation, comments: "Young people stand by Europe and democracy. It is the fundamental freedoms and values of Europe that they see as the most important achievements of the EU: Freedom to travel, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Young people are much more in favour of the EU's strengths than its weaknesses. 53 per cent of respondents see major strengths, 41 per cent see major weaknesses," says Thomas Ellerbeck, Chairman of the TUI Foundation.

According to the TUI Foundation study, only 17 per cent of respondents feel strongly or very strongly represented by the European Parliament (19 per cent in Germany). The situation is similar at national level: Here, too, only 17 per cent on average, and 23 per cent in Germany, say that "the Parliament represents me strongly or very strongly".

"Three quarters of young Europeans see voting as a civic duty. More than two thirds of them see elections as an effective means of political change, significantly more than in the previous year. At the same time, only 17 per cent of young people feel represented by the EU Parliament or their national parliaments. There is a critical representation gap. This threatens the legitimacy of the EU among those who are its future. This is why information and education in and outside schools remain an important element of political education," says Elke Hlawatschek, Managing Director of the TUI Foundation.

Young Europeans are very dissatisfied with the state of democracy in their own country. Only just under a quarter (23 per cent) are (somewhat) satisfied. Germany is an exception here: four out of ten (42 per cent) are satisfied.

In their own country, young people perceive major social tensions, particularly between those on the political left and right and between rich and poor people. Almost every second respondent observes anti-democratic behaviour in their own country (49%). In Germany, this figure is over half of those surveyed (55 per cent) and in Greece it is as high as 67 per cent. Four out of ten respondents state that democracy in their country is in danger.

"The democratic form of government is perceived to have strengths and weaknesses in its implementation. There is a stable foundation of values, young Europeans do not care which system they live in - whether in a democracy or autocracy. They do not think in camps, but rather pragmatically, soberly and critically. This rather flexible political attitude makes it difficult for the parties to offer clear-cut solutions," says political scientist Prof Dr Thorsten Faas from the Free University Berlin, who provided scientific support for the study.

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About the TUI Foundation: The TUI Foundation promotes and realises projects on the topic of "Young Europe". Its aim is to strengthen the European idea. It therefore makes long-term investments in regional, national and international projects focussing on education, training and individual and professional development. It is based in Hanover and, as an autonomous and independent foundation, is committed to the common good.