

SOLIDARITY AND DIVERSITY IN THE WAKE OF CORONA

Statement from the Youth of European Nationalities

Today would mark the beginning of YEN's Easter Seminar, our biggest event of the year with more than 80 participants arriving from over 20 different European countries. It would have taken place on the Knivsberg, Denmark, in the Danish-German border region, where YEN was established 36 years ago and the local minorities wanted to reflect on their 100-year anniversary this year with numerous events. Due to the ongoing coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, together with our co-organisers and hosts, the youth organisations of the German and Danish Minorities, we had to adjourn the event indefinitely. It is the first time in our history that we had to cancel a youth exchange in the format of a seminar, where minority youth from all over Europe would come together to exchange experiences and practices and be empowered to actively participate in society. We aimed at creating an understanding of what is minorities' stance in the light of rising populism and ethnocentric nationalism and what role the individuals from minorities and minority organisations have in counteracting that. With the growing wave of 'isms and phobias throughout Europe minorities often find themselves either increasingly threatened, or instrumentalized. As the biggest European youth organisation protecting and promoting the rights of national, ethnic and linguistic minorities, we understand our responsibility to take a clear stance against these concerning developments and are more than ever committed to safeguard the rights of minorities.

To those affected by the virus of nationalism and populism, we see you...

The current pandemic situation enhances these worrying developments and generates such intensive media coverage and intense mainstream discussions as no topic has before. It is crucial that in times when we are faced with a deluge of (dis)information and upsurge of credulity we seek not only information that match our preconceptions and expectations but rather strive to consistently and consciously apply critical thinking skills and distinguish opinions from factual statements.

As YEN, we observe that managing the pandemic while respecting human rights is an extensive challenge in many European States. The rapid global spread of the coronavirus is fuelling the populist rhetoric masked as nationalistic "stand united" calls to actions diminishing any kind of acknowledgement of diversity and driven by hate speech, xenophobia, hatred and stigmatization towards minorities. Pandemic should not act as an excuse to trade off fundamental rights to privacy and to exploit existing security measures and citizens' fear under

the pretext of safety. It is essential that as young members of society we remain vigilant not only against racist discourse but hold any officials and actors who utilize abuse of power accountable by exposing and speaking about clear violations of human and minority rights.



To those that are eager to restrict our democratic rights, we are watching...

As YEN, we recognize and acknowledge the effects this crisis has on everyone, yet we see that young people belonging to a minority are hit even harder. Once more, political representation, good socio-economic circumstances, education, and the expression in culture and language are all factors that are a given for the majority, whereas many minorities are still denied those rights and their lack prove to be serious, even deadly, obstacles.

First, we observe a danger to democratic values and fair representation as emergency laws are put in place. What is more, we see a threat in governmental representatives singling out minorities as scapegoats and a health hazard for the crisis, prompting prejudiced measures.

Second, we observe how poor socio-economic factors and linguistic bias can deepen inequality of minorities. Rural communities become even more isolated, and proper access to online, educational or health services are not secured. Moreover, we highlight a rising number of cases of minority communities confined to segregated tight settlements and overcrowded neighbourhoods with limited or no access to basic amenities, resulting in economic, accessibility and health issues. Access to information on health and governmental decisions is also limited, exclusive, even discriminatory when it is only offered in one official language. Acknowledging the need for communicating official decrees in minority languages leads to an inclusive approach and a better understanding of the measures taken. Not to be dismissed, the economic crunch will be felt by vulnerable groups as well as minority youth long after this health crisis recedes. The economic crunch will have a significant impact for their livelihood, but also for their cultural, educational, and youth activities as income and public funding will likely drop.

Last, the restrictions on assembly and the closing of borders will have a significant effect on minority activities, and the enjoyment and strengthening of minority identity. Though we understand the need for social distancing, we observe the immediate effect on minority organisations not being able to organise vital events, cultural gatherings and youth assemblies. With the smaller number of a minority, even more emphasis is placed on such events to distinguish, practice and support their unique culture and/or language. An online environment is not the perfect solution for this, as it is restricted by technological opportunities and limited language technology, which obstructs communication in the minority language. What is more, as borders are closing in Europe, freedom of movement for cross-border minorities is cut off with unforeseen consequences. As we mentioned, it is the first time for YEN too that we cannot organise an international seminar to connect, strengthen and empower minority youth.

We as YEN therefore:

Endorse measurements that take into account the diversity of Europe.

Call for well-considered state measures that are not taken on a xenophobe, racist or discriminatory base.

Stress the inclusion of young people in perspectives and in decision making processes.

Highlight the importance of social, economic, educational, cultural and linguistic inclusion of minorities in this crisis.

Underline the importance for social inclusion as this crisis will deepen socio-economic inequalities with long lasting effects.

Highlight that governments will be held accountable for any breach of human rights and democratic values.

Urge everyone to reflect on the management of the crisis by their representatives, especially the consequences of governmental decisions on human and minority rights.

Ask for the practical and economic support of minority and youth organisations so they can practice and support their unique culture and/or language, thereby supporting diversity.

Urge youth organisations to stay active and to let your voices be heard.

Press for governments to reflect on the restrictions and consequences when imposing border restrictions and to accommodate cross-border minorities as well as international exchange and cooperation of minorities.

Call for everyone to show solidarity, empathy and benevolence and step up to tackle this crisis without exclusion or prejudice.



*To those standing on the frontline,
we join you in the fight for solidarity and diversity...*



This crisis will create deep democratic, socio-economic and cultural breaches in our globalized world that will only be possible to overcome with a collective effort, by each of us showing solidarity and taking our individual but also collective responsibilities for society at large. As young people we have been on the front lines of different socio-economic fights, coming up with creative solutions to world challenges, and are eager to offer these experiences also in the light of this pandemic. However, monumental changes cannot be done alone. As members of minorities we continuously show that our strength is in building alliances, and we encourage the world to show empathy, and not allow solidarity and diversity to remain just slogans but rather strive to live up to their potential.