

Chapter 12

Interview with MEP Doris Pack³⁶

If you were a young person today in Europe, what elements would make you feel “disconnected”? And what realities would make you feel “connected”?

I can only tell from my perspective and I always felt “connected” to Europe. I grew up in Saarland, a small region at the frontier between Germany, France and Luxembourg, which was under French occupation during my childhood, and later under a French-oriented government. So I grew up between two worlds and I was really impressed when I noticed that there was a conciliatory attitude on the part of a neighbouring country upon which we had waged war before. My father had early on insisted upon establishing strong relations with France, French people and culture. So the French-German relationship has always been a positive experience for me.

As for the young people today in Europe, I think there are so many connection points, Europe is all around us, it’s everywhere in our daily life, we have peace, we can travel and live wherever we want, we have the same money, etc. We ARE Europe!

In the first volume of Perspectives on youth we were focusing on the future of youth policy and young people in 2020. What do you think will be the major challenges then?

The challenges young people will have to cope with after the year 2020 can’t be foreseen right now. It’s important to throw all our energy into the coming years until 2020 and to implement well the decisions recently taken, in order to get them out of the situation of crisis and to disprove the reputation of “a lost generation”. If we manage to achieve that, I certainly hope that young people won’t need to face problems of this scale and if they do, I hope they will be well prepared for that.

After 24 years as a member of the European Parliament, you will be retiring. What do you think has changed over this period of time for young people in Europe, for better or for worse?

The life of young people has reached a global dimension. Already at a very young age there is the possibility to develop further in multiple ways, whether it is having an international experience during school, later during university or even after entering the world of work. The well-established programmes are now all brought together under the title Erasmus+: Comenius for school education; Erasmus for higher education; Leonardo de Vinci for professional training; Grundtvig for adult learning; as well as the Erasmus Mundus for co-operation with third countries.

36. Interview conducted in April 2014, before the May 2014 European Parliament elections.

With the rise of the Internet and the growing number of member states in the European Union, the accessibility to education, information and cultural exchange has been decisively facilitated and promoted. However, this also bears some risks, for example a growing concurrence and competition in the labour market between individuals of all ages all over the member states, not just any longer on a national level. Nevertheless, the coming generations will adapt and find their place in a wider and more open Europe.

How connected do you think young people in Europe are with the idea of Europe? How has the European Parliament contributed to young people feeling more connected to Europe?

I think there are many young people who are really committed and passionate about the idea of Europe. You can see that already when taking a look at the impressive number of participants in the youth and education programmes, which, I would say, represent a big contribution in this context. But we shall continue our efforts in order to reach more and more people.

Is the connection (or disconnection) of young people reflected in their participation in the European parliamentary elections? What do you expect to see differently in the 2014 elections?

I think the way young people feel connected or not to Europe will of course be reflected in their participation in the elections. If they do not feel connected, they might vote for some Eurosceptic party or not vote at all. Euroscepticism and populism are spreading and they are dangerous. We really should worry and make a big effort to remind young people especially of the benefits of and the need for a united Europe. In some way, we are the victims of our achievements. Peace, freedom, a connected economy, co-operation... It seems like many people are taking those big achievements for granted. We must continue working on it in order to keep those achievements and to develop them further.