



Let's discuss European solidarity, not European identity!

Policy paper adopted at the General Assembly in Mechelen, 2013

Introduction

In times of social, environmental and economic crisis, the idea of an integrated Europe and cross-border solidarity is raised to question for more than once. More than ever, governments, single politicians, media and also people in the streets are more openly competing with each other, instead of standing side by side.

"Europe" is debated intensely and many times we are told that fostering a common "European identity" would be the solution to the current problems. The call for creating such an identity is coming from very different corners of the political spectrum - a fact that should be questioned by us instead of uncritically adopting the idea that there exists a definable core of what "Europe" means. Even green-left voices sometimes tend to declare a common identity as the foundation for political success. But we as Young European Greens want to call attention to the always problematic connotations of collective identities. A common European identity is in no way better or more suitable than national identities as a basis for political, emancipatory action. Collective identities are static constructs and don't reflect the diversity and dynamism of the European or World society. Moreover they draw an arbitrary line to signal where solidarity should stop - a European identity inevitably runs the risk to fortify those borders where Europe is supposed to end and secludes the continent to the rest of the world.

Nationalism

We, as Federation of Young European Greens, oppose nationalism in every kind of its possible appearances. We reject a "green" or "positive" patriotism. Patriotism always goes hand in hand with an excessive idealization of the „own nation“ or „in-group“ and is logically dependent on an outside or the „other“ to define and delineate the own group, the „we“. In the history of the European continent these sentiments, the struggle of nations to dominate each other politically and economically have caused considerable harm, violence and destruction and continue to produce exclusion and discrimination today.

We, as Federation of Young European Greens, fight for cross border solidarity and cooperation, for diversity and tolerance and want to overcome the idea of territorially bounded, collective identities and closed communities. Collective identities serve as substitutions for missing or insecure individual identities in times of mass production, mass culture, unemployment in an employment-focused late-industrial society and the lack of democracy and social rights. The last years' rise of nationalist parties and right-wing populist groups must therefore be seen as a symptom for much deeper problems we are struggling with. It is a sign of the failure of the neoliberal economic and social model and the neglect in the construction of the EU and Europe to be more than an integrated market.

Rising right-wing populism

Especially in these times of insecurity, lacking perspectives and economic downturn, right wing populism is on the rise in Europe and we should no longer perceive those parties and movements, which are growing since years now in different countries and

contexts, as single, isolated issues, but as a European wide and inherently European problem which calls for common answers. When exclusion and discrimination are turning into state policy in one country this is and must be of interest to all of us in Europe. The European Union and its member states, as well as civil society must get active on it.

Very often the demands of those right-wing groups even seem to resemble what we as greens fight for with regard to catchwords like "direct democracy", "women's rights", "localization of production" or conservation of the environment. All the more important it is, that we give answers to identified problems and clearly show the anti-egalitarian, racist and xenophobic core of their world views. We don't want to be silent on the ideologies these groups are promoting.

The reason why we don't have this debate is the wide-spread agreement within society over inequalities being somehow justified or the belief in the rightfulness of competition between different groups and nations, or systems of beliefs, like a European identity based on certain "European values". The attempt to use a "Christian-Judeo European identity" to exclude people on the basis of origin, religion, class or race is just another side of the same coin.

Euronationalism

If we don't start a debate on the advantages of politically and socially meaningful European integration others will and potentially reach hegemony over the definition of what is "European" and who "belongs here". This exclusive thinking might be targeted against states as well as against individuals - both is not acceptable to us.

A dangerous development is therefore the gaining importance of the "new right" on a European level with organisations like the 'generation identitaire' who try to promote a European identity and a powerful youth movement based on the idea of Ethnopluralism, the "war" against "Islamification", "multiculturalism", globalization and of course also the idea of non-static gender identities.

Here it shows that the call for a European identity and an identity Europe as a reaction to the "identity problem" of Europe is an exclusive, racist and anti-democratic project, which we shouldn't support. Europe is not the centre of the world, the continent does not have to be "protected against foreign domination" or alleged "mass immigration"!

Our solidarity should neither stop at national nor European borders. Moreover people shouldn't be put in categories like "European" and "not-European". No single person has the legitimacy to declare top-down a definite understanding of "European values" once and for all. This way of thinking of Europe in closed communities and narrow cultural confines is not limited to some activists organising via internet and doing street actions, it can as well be found in some basic structures of the European Union.

European citizenship

One example of the analogy between restrictive and exclusive nation states and the way the EU is developing is the current shape of European citizenship. European citizenship has been introduced with the Treaty of Maastricht 1993 and goes hand in hand with other symbols like an anthem and a flag resembling the ideology of nation states and national identities.

The problem: It is solely based on national citizenship of a EU member state and doesn't add any rights or mobility opportunities to the person holding it. European citizenship – which sounds promising as a step towards post national concepts of citizenship, is in its current shape not progressive at all with regard to overcoming the boundaries of nations and national or collective identities. It sticks to the conceptual framework of a closed community with strict membership accession procedures and hampers the path towards an inclusive society.

Ideologically it rather supports the idea of a European identity than of European solidarity with full acknowledgement of the diversity and the needs of people living and coming here. In fact it is a shallow idea without substantial underpinning and is therefore no contribution to a social Europe of mobility and intercultural exchange.

Our answer

We, as Federation of Young European Greens, want to develop Europe and European citizenship further. We don't need a European identity and reject that some people claim the right to define what it means and who is out and who is in. We need cross-border solidarity, we need more democratic participation, we need an open and inclusive Europe.

Therefore we want to replace the nation-based EU citizenship by a citizenship based on residence and easily available to everyone. This must entail political, social, economic and cultural rights. We want a mobility that is not only based on the interests of the market or the economy, but a mobility that is embedded in a Europe of social security and strong welfare states.

Rather than discussing the need of a European identity, we should discuss how we can achieve a more egalitarian and just European society. We should focus on institutional reforms like the strengthening of elected and representative bodies like the European Parliament or local, regional and national assemblies. We should focus on social policies like for instance the basic income scheme or other forms of European wide social transfers. We should focus on the enforcement of rights independent from origin, status of residence, gender, class etc. We should focus on grassroots activism and the ecological and social transformation of our way of living.

With this position paper, we as Federation of Young European Greens, want to raise awareness to the depicted discussions and position ourselves in this context. It serves as a clarification and re-affirmation of our opposition towards exclusive, collective identities and shall underline the necessity for us to develop more concrete proposals to implement our visions.