

# The Future is Ours

*Resolution of the European Youth Congress  
“Our Common Future-Realising Sustainability”  
August 6<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup>, 2000 in Hanover*

“Nothing is as powerful as an idea  
whose time has come.”

*Victor Hugo*

One **vision** shared by the youth of Europe is that of sustainability and intergenerational justice throughout the world. The idea of sustainability was agreed upon at the **1992 “Earth Summit“ in Rio de Janeiro** by 180 governments and several NGOs as a model for the next century. However, the governments have failed to fulfill their promise to implement this concept. Therefore several **European Youth organisations** decided to express their interest in speeding up the realisation of sustainability and intergenerational justice in politics and society. Sustainability is not just a matter for experts. It is indeed the young generation that will be mostly affected by the consequences of the present way of living and therefore has the very right and duty to make its voice heard in the debate about sustainability as it affects **“Our Common Future”**.

Sustainability must no longer be a catchphrase. It has to be realised in every day life as well as on a political and economical level. We, the European youth, strive for a society that is **ecologically** and **financially sustainable** and pays respect to **social justice**.

To achieve this we demand

1. to act in accordance with the principles of sustainability and intergenerational justice on the local, regional, national and European level,
2. to include sustainability as an defined and operationalised guideline in all national constitutions and also in the evolving European constitution,
3. to guarantee the participation of scientific institutions, NGOs and other representatives of the civil society in this enforcement process,
4. to improve resource efficiency by at least “factor 4”. The efficiency gains must not be overcompensated by an increase of consumption.
5. to implement a common European eco-tax in order to internalise external costs in the European economies.

6. to spread and deepen the awareness and the knowledge of sustainability issues through the education system and non-governmental initiatives,
7. to set up strict provisions for the limitation of public debts,
8. to ensure a sustainable population development by supporting less developed countries in their efforts to slow down the population growth through education, empowerment of women and enabling everybody to decide about the number of their children by providing family planning measures.
9. to use the chances of modern information technologies in order to improve the participation of the citizen in the decision making processes
10. to create a climate for cultural sensitivity and mutual respect amongst all Europeans in order to prepare the citizens for a globalised world.

These demands are the essence of the European Youth Congress. Various study groups debated sustainability in its three main dimensions: ecological and financial sustainability and social justice. The following chapters present their results and specific demands.

## **1 Ecological sustainability**

An ecologically sustainable society does not use natural resources in a manner that affects future generations negatively. When using non-renewable energy resources, the present generations should take into account the needs of following generations, their own children and grandchildren. Therefore these resources must be used as economically as possible at a reasonable cost. For the good of future generations, the present generations must not diminish through human activity the existing variety of the fauna and the flora.

The source for many ecological problems is fast population growth in the developing countries and overconsumption in the developed countries. Europe is one of the continents of our planet that achieves the highest level of resource usage per capita and at the same time, its resource-intensive lifestyle is imitated by a growing number of people and nations all around the world. Consequently, Europe has to take responsibility not only for its own development, but also for the future of the entire planet.

### ***1.1 Energy***

Energy is one of the essential global issues for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Current energy consumption patterns have been creating unprecedented, human-induced global environmental changes.

The energy problem that we are facing today has to be tackled in two main dimensions: limited resources and inefficient usage. Energy efficiency can be increased by a factor of four or much more. We urge the implementation of policies and measures that will serve as incentives for both industry and households to increase their energy efficiency. The enhancement of energy efficiency will lead to the creation of new jobs as well as an increase in GDP.

We recommend a restructuring of the framework of energy production by phasing out all public subsidies for non-renewable and stimulating investment in certified renewable energy technologies.

The risks of nuclear energy need to be taken into account, with special regard to safety and waste disposal. Energy related externalities have to be internalised. Feasible instruments include emission trading rights and eco-taxation.

## ***1.2 Ecological tax reform***

We, the youth, believe that the ecological orientation of the tax system is in the long run the most effective instrument for reducing energy consumption as well as pollution and global warming. We demand political leaders to tax consumption of nature so that prices more accurately reflect the ecological truth (polluter pays principle). This will create motivation to improve behaviour, which as such increases resource efficiency. It will also give incentives for a long term shift within economic activities away from those with negative environmental consequences. Tax revenue should be made available to support ecological, social and economic sustainability (e.g. by reducing labour costs).

## ***1.3 Urban Development***

For the planning process we favour the European model of decentralised concentration of urban and regional areas. The model is more sustainable because it uses less space, causes less traffic, provides a better social life and results in higher energy efficiency. We demand to reduce the separation of work and living spaces and to connect them by social components that all real costs of traffic be reflected in the price. Means of transport leading to sustainability should be promoted and the supporting infrastructure installed. Citizens should be more involved in the planning process of sustainable urban and regional planning by local Agenda21 processes.

We demand a reform of property taxes in order to create incentives for a sustainable land use and to prevent urban sprawl. We propose the scientific development of a “European

Sustainability Standards Building Pass” that evaluates the environmental impact of the whole life cycle of a building and similar initiatives. Last not least the EU and all European countries should integrate standardised sustainability indicators into the official statistics in order to be more efficient in their common efforts on sustainability.

#### ***1.4 Ecological Way of Living***

The realization of a change in our way of living depends on the reason of everyone but it needs the support of governments, of course. We, the youth, demand:

- Governments have to obligate producers and consumers to avoid a wasteful way of living by imposing sanctions and taxes
- Governments have to create laws which help to reduce the wasteful way of living at the future generations expense
- Governments have to do more for a better ecological education of the population. We demand the introduction of (compulsory) “environment courses” in every school.

#### ***1.5 Biotechnology***

The themes of our discussions were the biotechnological patenting and research financing of biotechnology, which at the moment are discussed in the European Union.

Here are our results:

- We need to develop a need-based priority on government based research to be decided by a panel of experts, NGO’s and the public.
- All biotechnology research and development must clearly declare its purpose and how it meets the needs of humanity.
- We need to ensure that we avoid monocultures and monopolies and thus maintain biodiversity and avoid dependence.

- We must provide a clearer dialogue between the biotechnology companies and the public.
- To meet its responsibilities, European regulatory authorities have to realise a viable strategy for a precautionary approach to research and development. We need liability measures which pertain to the special circumstances and the prolonged time period in the biotechnology fields.
- Clear labelling of products derived by modern biotechnology is a requirement for the choice of the consumer (labelling should contain the source and the effect of the modification to the product and its constituents.
- Development and progress in Europe must not be at the expense of the less developed countries.

### ***1.6 Population***

Although the fertility rate is only half as high as 30 years ago, 78 million people are added to our planet every year. Every one of them needs fresh water, food, energy and housing. This aggravates existing problems like soil erosion, desertification, overfishing, and clearing of the rainforest. Since the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo 1994 a broad consensus has been formulated on those measures which urgently need to be taken. We ask the European Heads of State and Government to keep their declaration of intent made in the „Cairo Program of Action“ to finance one third of the costs to realise these goals, especially

- universal basic education (including individual sex education) should be provided
- women should be empowered in family, public life and decision making institutions.
- everybody should be enabled to take a free and informed decision on the number and spacing of their children by providing universal family planning services.

## **2 Financial Sustainability**

In a financially sustainable society, no generation is allowed to live beyond its financial means, leaving future generations with the heritage of a high debt. To ensure sustainable financial politics, guaranteeing social peace and cohesion for future generations, we demand:

- to decouple the national pension systems from national budgets, in order to ensure a sustainable pension system that secures the needs people have when passing out of work. Beyond that a general minimum amount needs to be guaranteed by the state.
- to enact healthy competition within the states of Europe and to guarantee a just taxation by a same based taxation system throughout Europe, which is a stepped progressive system on income and revenues, comparable to the existing model in Ireland. In respect of the sovereignty and diversity of the states and to guarantee the necessary competition, the detailed regulations are defined by each state, individually.
  - to add to the criteria of the Treaty of Maastricht the circumstance that states participating at the growing together of Europe must join a **Sustainability Pact** (SP). The main three pillars of the SP, the states are binding themselves to fulfil, are:
    - “the one to one national budget amendment”, meaning that every state has to build up assets which cover the national debt.
    - to agree to fulfil the “one to one national budget amendment” by yearly saving the minimum sum equal to 1% of its own national debt until the ideal situation (1:1) is reached. The European Central Bank holds the money in an extra country account.
  - the states must ensure that their national debt is kept in a corridor. During a recession it may touch the top line which is capped at  $x\%$  GDP, while it must be kept stable at the bottom line of  $x\%$  GDP during an economical boom phase. Possible boundaries are 60% and 40%.

### 3 Social Justice

The world we aspire attempts to attain a fair allocation of resources between the North and the South, between the poor and the rich, between men and women and between the generations. Living together in Europe has to be based on tolerance, mutual respect and constant efforts to fight against old prejudices.

### ***3.1 Education***

Key developments towards a sustainable society have to be achieved in the education system. A sustainable society is a learning society - a society that reflects on itself and its future. It highly depends on a critical and active public. A strong emphasis has to be laid on soft skills like communication, tolerance, open-mindedness, creativity and responsibility. In addition, raising awareness for our European identity requires a broad knowledge of foreign languages to enhance communication and strengthen cultural understanding.

Three main goals define the role of educational institutions: Firstly the development of the self, secondly participation in society and thirdly preparation for profession. Good ideas and approaches already exist but lack realisation.

We, the youth, demand:

- a far-reaching curriculum and financial autonomy of educational institutions.

Self-government will increase efficiency, democratic consciousness, creativity and far-going adaptation of individual requirements. Students and pupils have to be regarded as the determining and evaluating “consumer“.

The equal and free access to education has to be guaranteed by the state. Not to forget is further and continuous education. Serious problems of illiteracy have to be fought. Enough funds have to be provided for institutions or further education (e.g. open university).

### ***3.2 Future of Democracy***

Existing democratic systems do not automatically create a sustainable society. Sustainability must be instituted in our democracy like the value of freedom or justice.

We, the youth, demand:

1. **The Development of a civil society.** Sustainability and democracy match best together in decentralised civil society. Active citizens take responsibility for other citizens and for the realisation of public values. To support civil society we need NGOs as intermediate organisations to build a bridge between the political system and the people.
2. **Lowering the level of political access:** Decision making processes should be located as local and as close to the people as possible. In addition to the formal representative democratic system alternative opportunities like referenda and local decision processes have to be introduced.

3. **Transnational Networks:** Nation-States are both smaller and larger than the ecological, social and financial problems. We need transnational networks of local actors, crossing all borders where broad action takes place, large common issues can be addressed and ideas can be interchanged and learned from.

### ***3.3 European Identity***

We believe that a common European identity exists between all peoples of Europe. It has its roots in commonalities in our history and is based on a common political will. This is in particular the will to establish a permanent peace between all peoples.

- An effective sustainable society can only be achieved when all Europeans, their nation states and the European multinational organisations join forces and pursue developing a sustainable society as a common aim. This shared and uniting political will of all Europeans is going to enhance even more a common European identity. Because they exclude non-Christians, concepts of Christianity as a basis for a common European identity are not to be accepted.

- Differences in cultures and languages do not weaken the common identity. An individual is able to identify with different entities at the same time. Therefore Europeans can likewise on a larger scale identify with humanity as such, and feel as citizens of the world, and on a smaller scale with their nation state, their region or city.

- The common European identity is not experienced without some grains of bitterness as the strong feeling of belonging to Europe on behalf of Eastern Europeans is sometimes confronted with exclusion from complacent Western European countries.

- The European Union is among all organisations the one that has achieved integration based on the concept of a common European identity to the furthest extent. Yet it has to enlarge and eventually take the shape of the federal state of all European countries willing to adhere.

### ***3.4 Religion and Ethics***

In the last decade promised global long term policies have not been achieved because of a lack of an ethical consciousness. Even though there is an increasing awareness that we are all interdependent, we are facing a fractionised world. But beyond superficial frontiers there is a broad consensus concerning ethical values that can serve as a common ground for peaceful

coexistence. According to that, we endorse the Declaration toward a Global Ethic of the Parliament of World's Religions and its four irrevocable directives:

**Commitment to a culture of non-violence and respect for life; solidarity and a just economic order; tolerance and a life of truthfulness; equal rights and partnership between men and women**

For organisations and persons bearing responsibility in public life this means that their decisions and actions should be guided by respect for all present and future life forms and preservation of natural resources for present and future generations. In order to solve our current challenges an additional crucial need is everybody's awareness of his/her personal responsibilities. This awareness can only be reached in a society with a just social and economic order which ensures one's basic needs. We demand equal opportunities for all human beings as far as possible and support for those having disadvantages.

The conflicts among religions or ethnic groups we are facing not only grounded in cultural, religious or ethnic diversity. Rather differences are manipulated by powerful interests, often through one-sided, incorrect information in mass media. Therefore we need a culture of transparency that enables access to information that is conclusive to mutual understanding and is fundamental for a participative civil society.

Alarmed by increasing willingness to use military force in conflict situations we demand to strive for finding peaceful solutions of domestic and international conflicts and to set an example for future generations for a culture of tolerance and peaceful coexistence.

All social, political and economic sectors must act to counter patriarchal forces of oppression by supporting a culture of mutual understanding, respect, equality and partnership between men and women.

### ***3.5 Different Cultures – One Future***

The European Youth Congress recognizes that as beings with multiple social identities, we can focus on similarities between different cultures. We come from around the world but our cultures and the values that are passed on to us are not entirely incompatible with one another. We have come to see as well as understand that there are many commonalities among our different cultures. Though they are instilled in us in many different ways, our cultures share core values, such as honesty, unity, a sense of justice, responsibility etc.

We must increase the recognition of core values and begin to identify with Humanity as a whole. Thus we recognize that the mutual respect amongst the different cultures is a basic need to avoid a clash of civilisations within Europe and the world. This can only be achieved by the exchange of knowledge and people of all kind of ages and professions. We demand that our governments shall together with NGOs and the Media take actions in order to strengthen the exchange between our nations and to create an atmosphere of interest for other cultures.

### ***3.6 Challenges of the Internet***

The digitalisation coming along with the Internet and happening all around world right now is revolutionary and changing the whole society we live in. We are facing the first generation grown up with the net. Therefore the main tasks for our digitalised future are creating a kind of framework without regulation the internet too much, a consciousness for it and the same conditions for everybody everywhere.

We, the youth, demand that

- the possibilities of the Internet have to be used to give the citizens more participation in the political processes. Co-operation within and outside the Internet and the whole political process is needed.
- the internet must always be a place of free opinion. Nevertheless a kind of internet governance is needed. We propose a global Table of Internet Rights and Duties as well as co-ordinating international organisations. This governance must be democratic and go beyond controlling IP-adresses.
- It has to be guaranteed that there is a possibility for everyone to get access to the internet. Therefore besides creating the technical preconditions we need also the education for the internet. Poorer or less developed countries have to be integrated into the process of digitalisation.

## **4 SG 8 – VOLUNTARY SERVICES**

Every young person must have the chance to do practical voluntary service in a social, educational or cultural activity, for the environment, or in the cause of peace, for the community and also for his/her own benefit. These will need to be

supplemented by offerings outside of the realm of formal education, through periods of learning experiences chosen freely by young people themselves.

We, the Youth, demand that the Governments of Europe, the European Union and the Council of Europe:

- recognise the importance of voluntary services both for society and for personal development; by officially encouraging and facilitating volunteer action, and by recognition in legislation and in constitutional forms,
  
- provide a level of financial assistance so that young people can participate in volunteer services regardless of their socio-economic status,
  
- ensure that legal and diplomatic obstacles are removed so that voluntary services can take places internationally regardless of political, economic or cultural circumstances.

#### ***4.1 Implementing Sustainability in a European Constitution***

Unlike history's previous generations, today's generations are in a position to make the continued existence of future generations on this planet impossible. Unsafe nuclear power plants, , biological, nuclear and chemical weapons, global climate change, the hole in the ozone layer, the extinction of animal and plant species, environmental contamination, and the extensive anthropogenic destruction of ecosystems (e.g. rain forests and oceans) are but some examples of these potentials. The list could be continued. The power of technology has led to a breach in the continuity of generations hitherto taken for granted.

Given these terrifying and hitherto unknown technological potentials which are continuing to accelerate at an unprecedented rate, the generations of parents and grandparents who today hold the reins of political power are capable of profoundly influencing and changing the

natural resource base on which human life depends. Those changes are potentially so radical that policymakers need to follow a new ethical imperative that needs legitimate assertion in the constitution. This would guarantee that politicians do not only fulfill the interests of present generations of voters, but also take into account the rights of future generations.

The role of the European Union and other pan-European institutions in implementing the concept of sustainability in Europe is vital. The concept of sustainable development has already been included in the current EU treaties as one major principle of the EU (see Art. 2, 6, 174-176 EC Treaty). We, the youth, demand

- that the enforcement of these EC Treaty provisions also in the applicant countries needs to be supported by strict procedural requirements, institutional arrangements, "sustainability training" for all persons involved in executing EU policies in the sensible policy fields and additional funding,
- the evolving European Constitution including the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights should further strengthen the implementation and enforcement of the concept of sustainable development (especially through extending integration clause and creating fundamental rights for access to environmental information and access to justice for environmental NGOs and independent environmental agencies). The most important thing is to define "ecological sustainability".

Regarding national constitutions, we, the youth, demand:

- the Rio declaration on sustainable development, mainly the principles on intergenerational justice, transparency and participation and polluter pays and precautionary principle should serve as a basis for national constitutional provisions. Since recently reformed constitutions like Poland (1997) and Finland (2000) better reflect these principles, we encourage other countries to follow these examples. Regarding Germany, Article 20a should be reformed in order to tell exactly what ecological sustainability means.
- to recognize the special role of NGOs in the field and call for active participation of all sectors of civil society in the implementation process. Government should enable NGOs to have an influence in plotting national strategies.

## Resume

The youth of Europe came together at the EXPO 2000 in Hanover to deliver a message to the Heads of States and Governments: we are interested in shaping our common future!

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*Hanover, August, 11<sup>th</sup>, 2000*