



Workshop 5: Youth activism, systemic change and recovery in Europe

On the 3rd day of Civil Society Days, we are going to discuss “Youth activism, systemic change and recovery in Europe” in our workshop. I am Furkan Sorkuncuk, the intern of Volonteuropa since November 2020, and following my last year of bachelor at law at Galatasaray University in Istanbul, Turkey, in an EU candidate state. I did my Erasmus Programme in Belgium, in Louvain-la-Neuve, at l’Université Catholique de Louvain for just 5 months during which I had a chance to get to know European identity and European culture, and become an intern of international civil society organizations, for instance, at Volonteuropa.

Volonteuropa is a European, globally focused, non-profit network working to achieve more social justice in Europe and beyond, through active citizenship and volunteering with its partners and almost 40 members of different countries. We, as Volonteuropa, have been fighting for young people’s rights since 1981. We all saw that COVID-19 has effected the young generation and we are here to discuss the sustainable recovery of the future of Europe. It is a pleasure for us to work with European Youth Forum and EESC Sustainable Development Observatory. Many thanks for the supports that have been coming from EESC Liaison Group team.

It is an undeniable fact that COVID-19 has largely impacted all areas of our lives, and the young generation has been also hit by COVID-19 in terms of education, social life, employment, and mental health. Since the very beginning of the pandemic, in many countries, especially the ones where they cannot speak up, young people are not considered in the foreground of fighting against COVID-19 and of the recovery plans.

Since the beginning of my childhood, I was taught that we, as a young generation, were the future of the world by the politicians and my teachers. Now, in 2021, I have been still hearing the same words from the politicians defining my identity as a future of our society. However, despite what has already been said during the decades, the participation, the real participation of the young people in the decisions has been neglected by the politicians. I would like to emphasize that, in my twenties, as an individual and on behalf of the young people, at least, from Turkey, we are not just the future of our society anymore. We have a key role to produce dynamic and effective solutions to those that affecting our lives. We, all together, need to tackle COVID-19, climate change, and violation of human rights.

We, again, as the young generation, have been struggling with our mental health to remain calm and healthy. It’s been one year since the Covid-19 restrictions started and in these



demanding times, we also need to stand for our rights. For instance, in Turkey, young people have been stating and defending their rights to have qualified and independent universities after the appointment of an irrelevant rector, by Erdogan, to Bogazici University, which is one of the most prestigious ones in Turkey. As a Turkish undergraduate, I was looking for a way to work in Brussels to convey young people's messages and broaden my vision of civil society. Despite all the issues related to COVID-19, I was able to see my dreams have become true thanks to Volonteuropa and now having new ones to achieve. What we need to do, now, is to have dreams and strive to make them happen with solidarity.

I have never had a chance to meet physically with any of those that we talked or worked with before in Brussels but virtually. I, for instance, have never spoken even with our Secretary-General in person. However, I wholeheartedly say that I feel like we are a community and I am one of the members of that community. As Briqena Xhomaqi, co-chair of EESC Liaison Group said that the solidarity is our most effective vaccine to overcome COVID-19 at the opening session of the Civil Society Days. To my mind, the EU is the most well-structured entity that humanity has ever created, and I believe that the EU recovery plan is going to tackle the issues thanks to effective and efficient participation of the young generation instead of their just inclusion.

Furkan Sorkuncuk, Volonteuropa Intern

Istanbul, 3 March 2021