

IED YOUTH ACADEMY REIMS 2022

The difficult road to Democracy

Thanks to the Institute of the European Democrats (IED), 40 youngsters from 12 different countries gathered in Reims for the first time in two years to discuss the past, the present and the future democracy in Europe as Young democrats for Europe (YDE).

Numerous conferences, workshops, and even a tour of the Reims Cathedral led to a main conclusion: the need for a greater sense of what it is to be European in 2022.



The current state of European democracy and its future prospects.

Petr Mucha, Prof. at New York University, Prague

Petr Mucha was one of the actors of the Velvet revolution in Czechoslovakia. For him digital and climate revolution are the birthmarks of a new Democracy, a democracy for the XXI century. This democracy needs to be more globalised but also more local.

This democracy can be defined around five main points:

- Need for global assistance for democracy in many post democratic countries especially in Hungary and Poland;
- Civic education must be enhanced;
- Democracy considered as a moral duty, this leads to the importance of Europeans democratic values;
- Spread of lies and fakes news are part of a disinformation tools in authoritarian regimes to disturb democracies, this must be counter by liberal democracies;
- European democracies are very important and need to be strengthened and foster a new post-national common narrative.

The European Union is not just a single market but it's about a community of values that need to be worked on. He uses the different levels of identity from Vaclav Havel

The war in Ukraine is not a clash between two countries but between two political ideas: authoritarian regime against a vibrant call for democracy.

The participants then emphasised on the need to raise awareness on the cost of changes: condemning Russia is not enough if we aren't not able to pay extra euros and cut off gaz and oil supply from Russia; on Climate, States need to implement changes, at local and global level.

Children should be born with the idea that the future is on their hands: political education is not strong enough on that matter.

At the end, what people want to see are results, so policies must be implemented taking effective actions to change the life of citizens.

State of Play: What is the state of democracy in Europe in 2022?

H.E.Mr. Vladimir Astapenka, Deputy Head of The National Anti-Crisis Management, Former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus, Ambassador in Brussels.

The first years after the dissolution of the USSR were very productive for Belarus but then began the era of Alexander Lukashenko in 1994. The idea of belonging to Europe was always there in the minds of Belarus people. The official results of the presidential elections in 2020 said that Lukashenko won with 80% of the votes but that didn't align with the public opinion. Votes were robbed and that makes Lukashenko an illegitimate president of Belarus. This resulted with protests at which people were arrested for disagreeing with the regime.

Russian troops didn't leave Belarus territory after the military practice and have used Belarus for attack on Ukraine. The explanation was if we don't attack them, they will attack our troops located in Belarus.

Sanctions alone won't change the situation in Belarus, generally it's up to people, the change needs to be from within.

Opposition is mostly in jail or exiled from the country. Around 300 - 400 Belarussians had to flee. Opposition is mainly based in Warsaw and Vilnius, operating and trying to renew democratic movements.

During the discussion the view on Europe and Ukraine joining the EU was given, along with the perspective on the human rights problem in Belarus and the personality cult of Alexander Lukashenko.

To conclude, democracy is something we need to fight for, we need to protect our values and democracy.

Mariia Isakova, Ukrainian actress, originally from Kyiv.

Since 2013 she has been living in Paris. Since the beginning of the Dignity Revolution and the war in Donbass, she has taken an active part in the struggle of the Ukrainian people.

Until the age of 5 she didn't hear the Ukrainian language. Ukrainian identity was denied and there was a lot of propaganda that Ukrainian people are actually Russian. She was exploring Ukrainian history for her play and found over 50 Ukrainian revolutions in the past along with so much suffering of the Ukrainian people and even the Ukrainian language was forbidden for some time in history. Ukrainians were inspired to build a democracy throughout history. Considering the future of Ukraine, she is optimistic.

For her, the Ukrainian war wedged by Russia demonstrated once again the resilience of her country. The call for help to the world has been especially well heard in Europe. Still, the Ukrainians are to her point of view very lonely, Europe needs to act very quickly. Through military and emergency aid of course, but also considering the integration of Ukraine in the EU.

This dramatic situation has been very special to her that lives in France and she feels knows more Ukrainien than ever. She knows want to share her story and involve closer the French and Europeans in her struggle.

Discussing Democracy in Europe

Frédéric Petit, French MP and Deputy-secretary-general of the European Democratic Party (EDP)

For the last six months, since our last discussion, the situation of Democracy changed a lot in Europe. We had to re-imagine the place of an MP during a war. I live in Cracow and all of the countries sharing a border with Russia or Ukraine are very concerned because of their Russian minority. I have to coordinate and find concrete solutions to organise the actions of the civil society. In France when you have a disaster has to act. It's the same here

I was in Kiev and Vilnius for a French representation in those countries. The democracy is a question that the citizens have to act by their own. This war is about the history of this region of Europe. A war about models of State organisation. Do we think we can act together against a threat even if we don't speak the same language or if we have to have only one language and only one boss? It's two models

There is a reconstruction about Russian history. In that point of view all of the nearby Russian countries have to have only one boss and be in only one country. In Europe we don't need that to be effective on mainly subjects.

I'm convinced that the European community didn't begin after 1945. For example the Baltic and Black Sea showed many corporations and 500 years from Baltic to Black Sea there was only one leader during the republic of the two nations. And they fought against Russians. We can eat and fight together even if we don't speak the same language.

In my opinion, in the Bible, babel is a punishment but I think it was an answer : look what divides you and you will find me. The countries need to disagree and argue because this is the essence of democracy.

About 1% of the European population (this 3 millions) the issues do not have to be related to the amount of refugees. If Ukraine can do the farmer's job the Europe will suffer and be hungry.

A new generation of Ukrainians can go to school. All of this is not an external issue. It's our issue because of the historical aspect and actual interests.

There is only one good thing : Ukraine is now not only gathering around them all of the nations and all of the democratic institutions in Ukraine which are till young. All of the ministers, the MP and of course the presidency work and show their work. They are building a young democratic country. And they are growing-up

We are on the top of a very deep history of how to solve a conflict between remaining human beings. I don't have a magical tool to avoid the war but we are talking about democracy and avoiding the war. We have to disconnect the way of thinking that the democratic guys have to be on the opposite of the soldiers and ready to fight guys

We have to fight for what we are, which is democracy and diversity.

I've changed my mind about propaganda and freedom of press. I used to think that every citizen had to be able to hear everything whether it was true or false. But now I think in war time with murders and risks we have to be able to take some repression measures. It doesn't mean that we made a mistake to not take measures earlier because it was another context. During the republic of two nations, they created something new for Europe because they show that differences don't stop to fight together.

About Ukraine joining the EU, I think we have to help them with reconstruction. But joining the EU is too early. We can help them build infrastructures. I'm sure we will be connected with Ukraine with this reconstruction and we have to act quickly. First of all we have to fight against corruption. After Maidan in Ukraine there were volunteers helping ministers in the government. It was a citizen action because Ukraine was not able to manage all of the sudden help incoming.

Discussions and extra-meetings

On top of these in-depts conferences, we had several workshops and internal meetings that helped us make our point of view on the topics discussed with the speakers. Thanks to the great facilities of the Hotel, we also had nice and different places to brainstorm and make our minds about matters that aren't so easy to apprehend. Whether the EU should cut the oil and gas imports or not, should Ukraine join the EU through a fast-track procedure and what can the EU can do to closely integrate youth in its policies. It was really helpful, and the 40 participants are still processing all that has been said.

Finally, the dinner and the tour of the Cathedral helped us to better understand the French and European history of Reims, seeing how close we were as were the European architects that built the Cathedral or many buildings.

*By Ugo Rostaing
Secretary General, Young democrats for Europe*