

Emilio de Diego Raba:
What is the next European generation going to be like?

Today, I'm going to talk about what Europe means for different generations. Our parents or grandparents have lived most of their lives with the feeling of belonging to a country. A German was from Germany, a Swede was from Sweden and a Spaniard was from Spain. Just that, nothing more. It was normal to stay in the same province and work for the same company for all your life. There were important mentality differences even among provinces within the same country, so it's easy to imagine the lack of knowledge about other countries. Of course they used the term "Europe", but just in a geographical way. They never imagined the possibility of having a common Europe as we understand it today, where we have so many matters in common.



Current young generations are used to a different concept of Europe. It can be said that young people have some kind of identification with a "European personality". I can say that above all, most of us feel that we are European citizens. And why is that? Well, to begin with, age is the main factor: for example I was born in 1986 and the European Community already existed. Indeed, Spain joined the community that very year, so for me it's been there all my life. However, our parents needed to practice a change of mentality which required time. This has been a very slow process. Since the origins of the European Coal and Steel Community and the European Economic Community with just six initial countries, more than 60 years have been necessary to develop the current European Union.

Another cause of the difference in perception between generations is due to the impact of globalisation. Let's take a look at hobbies for instance: People now have access to an enormous number of activities, common to all countries. I'm sure that most of you will know what I'm talking about if I ask you about the TV series Breaking Bad, or about some famous DJ, let's say Calvin Harris, or if you are more traditional rock lovers, AC-DC. Nowadays it's really easy to find topics to talk about with other Europeans, demonstrating how much people have in common. 40 years ago, this wasn't that easy: There was no internet, travelling was far more expensive, and the most important barrier was language. English wasn't at all as widely spoken as it is today.

But I would say that the main reason that helped to develop this feeling of belonging to Europe is the international programmes. Some examples that deserve to be

mentioned are Leonardo da Vinci, Comenius, Grundtvig, Erasmus Mundus, Tempus, Alfa or Edulink. Among them, the Erasmus programme is the best known. Since its creation in 1987, with 11 starting countries and 3200 students, more than 3 million students have gone through this experience, and there are 33 countries currently involved.

Programmes like Erasmus allow you to live in a country where traditions, habits, and food are different. But once you get to know that society at a deeper level, you realise that in the end, people there are very much like people in your home country: they have their jobs, their families, their daily routines... We are not so different after all.

I want to add that this feeling applies to almost every young person. It doesn't really matter whether they have an academic background or not. The tendency within the population is to support European ideals. This is why we can't afford to end this kind of initiatives.

This is my main point and the reason I chose this title for my presentation: what is the next European generation going to be like? As everybody knows, we are going through a horrible economic crisis. There are several countries that are thinking about reducing or ending Erasmus programmes. We are at a turning point. If our governments make the wrong choice now, Europe is in serious danger of unraveling.

It's true that right now the main field where we need to focus attention is economic viability and providing help to the weakest families. But we can't downgrade European initiatives like Erasmus or stop developing new ones which would lead us to a more efficient and promising Europe, perfectly capable of standing out in this competitive world.