

Brussels, 17 February 2016

Presidents of pan-European youth organisations call upon the European Council to preserve the Schengen principles

Dear President Tusk,

We are writing to you today as representatives of fourteen pan-European youth organisations - representing millions of young people across Europe - because we are seriously worried about the future of the Schengen Area. Open borders are one of Europe's greatest milestones – we want to keep it that way.

The increased migratory pressure in recent months has led to a gradual suspension of the institutions of the Schengen Area. Most notably, we have seen temporary reintroductions of border control between Schengen countries. This is in line with the Schengen Borders Code that allows for these measures only if they are in proportion with an established serious threat to public policy or internal security and are limited in time. This development goes to show that we have failed in giving up internal borders without putting the necessary effort as a Union to secure our external borders. This has resulted in our governments not really trusting each other nor the European agreements and their effective enforcement.

It is our view that none of these unilateral actions by Member States will be able to provide sustainable solutions to the current challenges. Nor does suspending Schengen make Europe safer. Only by strengthening the policies that are common to us all, such as securing the external borders of the Schengen Area through common efforts, will we be able to preserve the fundamental principles and the public good of the European Union.



However, when European solidarity is needed more than ever, some Member States seem eager to stay out at all costs. We are troubled by this helplessness, this lack of vision and creativity in leadership that our heads of states and governments have shown. We believe that closing borders leads to closed minds. We could not be clearer: we want a European solution to a European challenge. Faced with pressure of migration and our responsibility to provide refuge to people fleeing conflict and terror in the neighbourhood of Europe, many have unfortunately started to question our European project.

But our challenges are not only in finding solutions for the problems we confront today, but building capacity to be able to respond also tomorrow and years to come. It is unlikely that pressure of migration to Europe will ease or disappear in the future: on top of armed conflict, future drivers of migration will increasingly include environmental disaster and climate change. Further, already now, children and young people are often amongst the most affected; according to the EU Fundamental Rights Agency 43% of the world's refugees are children.

This is why we call upon the European Council to debate and adopt comprehensive, long-term and common European solutions to manage migration and security issues while maintaining the core principles of the European Union. These should be grounded in fundamental rights, and must include an EU border force and stronger cooperation between European police and security forces, but also a common European asylum policy with better legal channels to ensure the rights of migrants and refugees and a permanent redistributive quota system to replace the Dublin Regulation.

For our generation, border controls in Europe are a memory of the past – like black and white television or telephone boxes. Travelling across borders without noticing it has become a part of everyday life for many – on the daily commute to work or study, for leisure or to see friends and family across Europe. Open borders are also vital for trade and provide huge economic benefit, which in turn help to keep peace between nations. Open borders are the strongest symbol for a united Europe. We do not want to ever be divided again.

A recent online campaign by the Young European Federalists hit a social media reach of well over 1 million people with the hashtag #DontTouchMySchengen in just a few days. We believe this is a strong message to the European Council to take responsible and long lasting decisions for Europe and the generations to come.

In the name of the pan-European youth we demand solutions for the future, not from the past.



Yours sincerely,

Christopher Glück, President of the Young European Federalists (JEF) Europe
 Johanna Nyman, President of the European Youth Forum (YFJ)
 Konstantinos Kyranakis, President of the Youth of the European People's Party (YEPP)
 Laura Slimani, President of the Young European Socialists (YES)
 Vedrana Gujic, President of the European Liberal Youth (LYMEC)
 Gerard Bono I Fonoll, Secretary-General of the European Free Alliance Youth (EFAy)
 Aleksandra Kluczka, President of the European Students Forum (AEGEE)
 Safi Sabuni, President of the Erasmus Student Network (ESN)
 Matthäus Fandrejewski, President of Confédération Européenne des Syndicats Indépendants Jeunes (CESI Youth)
 Michael Boris Mandirola, World Esperanto Youth Organisation (TEJO)
 Liese Vandenheede & Annette Wahle, Presidents of the International Federation of Catholic Parochial Youth Movements (FIMCAP)
 Paolo Emilio Adami, Chair European Non Governmental Sports Organisation Youth (ENGSO Youth)
 Brendan Power, Board Member of Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU)
 Martin Maska, Treasurer of European Youth Press - Network of Young Media Makers, e.V. (EYP)



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