



# A lost generation? The challenges and hopes of European youth

European View  
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[journals.sagepub.com/home/euv](https://journals.sagepub.com/home/euv)**Mikuláš Dzurinda**

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Europe's young people are at a critical crossroads. They were born into the promise of a safe and prosperous continent, but today face a perfect storm of challenges. The issues explored in this edition of the *European View*, from economic instability and the complexities of the digital world to the threats of disinformation and rising extremism, are not abstract. They are concrete realities that shape the daily lives of millions. They are why well-educated graduates cannot afford homes of their own, why promising careers are being overshadowed by automation and why trust in our democratic institutions is eroding.

We must confront *three core problems* facing the younger generation in Europe.

- *Economic insecurity.* The dream of economic stability, which was a given for past generations, has become incredibly hard to reach. Soaring housing costs and the rise of precarious gig-economy jobs make it extremely difficult for young people to build a stable financial foundation. Addressing this economic instability must be a top priority for the EU.
- *The digital divide and disinformation.* While the digital world offers unprecedented opportunities, it also brings significant risks. The constant flood of disinformation and the isolating effects of social media erode trust, fuel division and make it hard to distinguish fact from fiction. We must give our youth the tools to navigate this complex information landscape.

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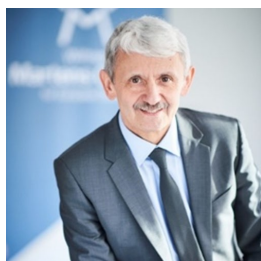
- *The rise of populism and extremism.* For my generation, the main enemy was the Iron Curtain of Communism, a clear threat to freedom. Today's challenge is the new wave of demagogues who exploit fear and division. They offer simplistic solutions to complex problems, eroding democratic values and trust in established institutions. This is not just an EU problem; it is a global one. The spread of disinformation and emotional manipulation creates virtual walls between people and nations, leading to increased international tensions and the breakdown of global cooperative efforts. The rise of insular, nationalistic policies undermines international alliances and security frameworks, making the world more volatile and unpredictable.

Despite these challenges, three hopes remain for the future. This is a generation with immense talent and resilience. Their hopes are not for a return to the past, but for a future that is more just, sustainable and inclusive. They are the innovators, activists and entrepreneurs who are already forging a new path forward.

- *Resilience and engagement.* I am encouraged that young people have not become apathetic about public life. They are voting in elections and demanding that politics serves them. This active engagement is a powerful driver for positive change that we must support.
- *Optimism about the EU.* This generation is not burdened by the historical baggage of the Cold War. They see Europe not as a fragile political project, but as a shared home where they can freely live, study, work and travel. They hope for a more unified, secure and just Europe—one that leads on security and affordability.
- *European values and identity.* Values are the guiding principles in a complex world. The values of Judeo-Christian teachings and secular humanism provide a strong foundation for our society. At their core is freedom—freedom of thought, expression and choice. This is the most important thing we have. We must not let anyone take this freedom from us, whether demagogues or those at the ideological extremes.

It is our duty, as policymakers, thinkers and leaders, to listen, understand and act. We must not just treat the symptoms of young people's frustration but also confront the underlying systemic problems that have created this situation. This is not just about helping them: it is about securing the very future of the European project. The Martens Centre is dedicated to this mission, and I am glad we can present this collection of insights. I hope it will contribute to an even deeper understanding of what troubles the younger generation and help us to find ways to effectively face these challenges.

### Author biography



**Mikuláš Dzurinda** is president of the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies and a former prime minister of Slovakia (1998–2006). He has also held the positions of minister of transport and minister for foreign affairs.