



# EUTOPIA

## Being young in Europe

### *Common European Youth Identity* by Gábor Tóth

It goes as a cliché that today's world is a highly globalized one with a lot of freedom for movement between countries and, with the internet's advent, everything has got closer, new possibilities have emerged, and you can feel like you are part of a community that is not confined either by country borders or ethnicity or religion. But let's just talk about Europe. This aforementioned feeling is even more amplified within our continent thanks to the efforts and achievements of the European Union, which has managed to bring about a wonderful partnership between the collaborating countries, thus offering a plethora of new opportunities for the younger generations.

One of the perks of the European Union, perhaps the most important one, which is why I would like to dedicate the rest of my short essay to it, is the freedom of movement between the member countries. What could possibly induce a common identity among people more than the chance to travel, study or work anywhere you please with hardly any restrictions? You

can go to London to improve your English or you can go to Paris if your dream is to live in the city of love. You are welcome anywhere, and since nearly every younger European person speaks at least a basic level of English, you are able to communicate with fellow students or fellow workers (or fellow travelers – it's not uncommon that tourists coming from two different countries meet in the capital of a third country and end up roaming the city together) and make long-lasting friendships with them.

Here is my story. I've decided to see the world and travel around with my girlfriend before settling down somewhere (preferably not my home country, Hungary). I applied for jobs in several countries, and finally got one in Kraków, Poland. I didn't hesitate to take it because Kraków is a beautiful city, and it's always nice to get to know foreign people along with their culture, and maybe learn a little bit of the language. We have been here for four months now, and plan to stay for a few years before moving on to

another country. It's been a fabulous experience so far, we share the apartment with three Polish students and a Polish university lecturer. We learn some Polish from them, they learn some Hungarian from us, but mostly we speak in English. The same applies to my colleagues. The young people we've met are quite open and accepting, we go out with them often and they make sure that we don't feel excluded.

So far so good, I'm having the time of my life in Kraków, but let me just share with you a negative trend in Hungary which partly affects our mobility and interferes with the idea this essay is about. Because, unfortunately, as the Hungarian saying goes, "life is not a sponge cake" (that is, it's not a piece of cake)... The current government does not favour young people leaving the country to work or study under better conditions, but instead of making Hungary more livable (okay, I admit they are trying, but they are not succeeding), they try to keep us back by other means. For example, the latest Higher Education Act makes it mandatory for those

students who study on state scholarships to work twice as much in Hungary within 20 years as the length of their university programme. This means that if your family doesn't have enough money to pay for your education but you are a good student and you get a state-funded place in university and acquire not just a BA/BSc but an MA/MSc degree (3 + 2 years), then you have to work for at least 10 years in Hungary.

But let's disregard hindering factors for the moment. The fact is that most young European people have grown up in an environment of considerable international cooperation, which has had a huge impact on how they see the world. Since most of us have grown up without the terrible experience of wars and conflicts, we are the generation – and especially the ones following us – that has the gift to overlook past grievances and enmities, and make Europe a place where people are proud not only of their nationality but also of their Europeanness.