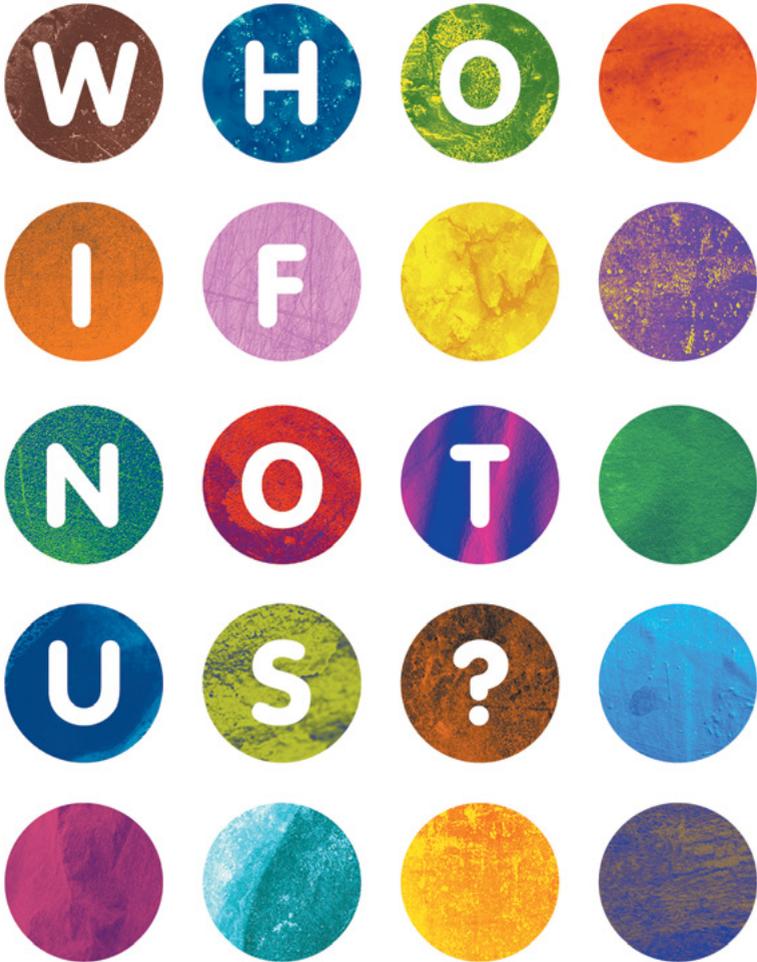


READ AND
PASS ON!



A four-step guide to empower Europe and our generation

The
Young
European
Collective

**W H O
I F
N O T
U S ?**

*A four-step guide to empower Europe
and our generation*

by

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For you.
Europe's future.

Like Europe, this text is a work of many different perspectives coming together under a common goal. Even though we may have different views, we all support the overall message.

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And most importantly, thank you to our families and friends for their constant support.

for you

The truth is, we don't know you. We don't know your name, where you come from, or where you want to go. Maybe you are one of those young Europeans desperately looking for a job, despite having two degrees. Maybe you have no degree at all and have been told that that's the problem. Maybe you need to move to another country, but you don't want to leave your home. Maybe you don't really know where you belong. Maybe you feel strongly about human rights, gender equality, or the environment, but no one listens. Maybe you don't really care about any of these things. Maybe you are full of ideas, but don't dare to share them out loud. Maybe you want to find out who you are, but you don't know where to start. Or maybe you just want to be who you are, whatever that means, but you find that you can't.

What we do know about you though is that you are needed. Your feelings, your ideas, and your voice matter. But times are not always easy. We feel the uncertainty and anxiety in our generation and across Europe. Many of us don't know where our lives will go and whether we will be able to reach a good standard of living, lead fulfilling lives and be safe. Our home continent faces many fears and conflicts, and the last years have proven that the continent still needs a lot of work.

However, what if we told you that nothing is set in stone and that there is something that we can do, something YOU can do?

preface

let's start the journey



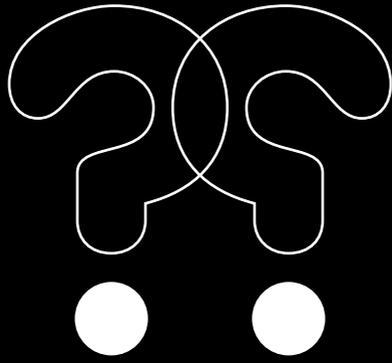
let's start the journey

You are late. Panicked about missing your train, you run up the stairs of the central train station. You bump into a backpacker with a massive bag and your coffee, already cold, spills on the floor. Someone shouts at you, but there is no time to respond. You're almost there. You hear the conductor's whistle blow and you pick up your speed. Hurrying up the last flight of stairs, you trip and find yourself on the platform floor. Ignoring the pain, you jump back up and run towards the already moving train. You can't make it any more. Just as you are about to lose hope, a train door next to you flies open, and an arm appears, pulling you inside. The door closes behind you as you catch your breath. You slowly get back on your feet, still panting. The guy who pulled you into the train looks at you curiously while you organise your belongings. "Would you like to join us?" he asks. Having no other plans and grateful for the company, you agree and follow your new acquaintance down the aisle, where a group of twelve young Europeans are meeting.

This group, like Europe, consists of a diverse mix of young Europeans, eager to meet you and ready to go on this journey together.

intro

who are we?



who are we?



Where will our adventures take us? As we move through the city and see apartment blocks, parks, and open areas passing by, we get settled on the train. Over a shared lunch, we start talking about ourselves.

Across generations

When we look at who we are, we always have to consider where we have come from – our past. Many of the issues that we, the young people of today, are dealing with are not new; uncertainty, fears, anxiety about the future, or even the present. Surely, if we ask our grandparents, they will be able to tell us a story or two echoing these feelings.

“Once, already some while ago, I visited the D-day landing beaches with friends from all over Europe. This is the place where the Allies arrived to free Europe from the Nazi occupation. We sat there, digging into the sand and at the same time, digging into our feelings.

I heard Germans talk about their shame. I heard Dutch people talk about the opportunities their grandparents missed. I heard the French talk about their passion for liberty. It was a long afternoon, and through it all, we sat there together, sharing our feelings, crying, hugging.

It was in that moment that I realised the beautiful connection I have with all of them. They are Europeans, just like me. We share this common history. We share this experience. Moreover, we share a commitment to not repeat the mistakes of our history, but this time, to work together to build the future of this continent. I will never let that go.” (Thomas, 20, France)

A lot of us have or had grandparents who actually witnessed World War II. Today, two generations later, we sit with each other, British, Poles, Italians, Swedes, and others. All of us together, carrying the stories of those before us. But still, all of us at peace with one another – with no memories of the huge gap that separated us in the past, but rather, the stories from our grandparents.

Our grandparents fought on the battlefields and stood eye-to-eye with their enemies. They had to face death, loss, and the darkest depths of human nature. Their lives were defined by war. They had to deal with a continent in ruins, build something out of little, and even forget personal dreams. Though their times were hard, they faced the challenge and set up something for future generations to build upon.

The first ones to follow were our own parents. They grew up with somewhat of a clearer path ahead of them; a job to be held for decades, a family, and a mostly predictable life. Some of them may have wanted to change, but mostly, they were reassured by their security, and their limitations. They knew the existing constraints and managed to live their lives in a pragmatic, sequential order.

Introducing a new generation

And then, finally, here we are. The children of our parents, the grandchildren of our grandparents. We are a newest generation facing new challenges. The media and sociologists frequently de-

scribe all those born between 1980 and 1998 as “Generation Y.” Over time, the “Y” began to stand for the question “Why?” – assuming that our lives are just one big question mark, as we don’t seem to know what we really want.

We are one of the least definable generations – or at least, so they say. Unpredictability is supposedly an attribute of ours. There have never before been so many young people going to university and getting prestigious degrees. We are the first generation to benefit from the European integration; for many of us, it has become far more normal to travel outside our home country, often even without a passport, study abroad, learn different languages, and, sometimes, use the same currency in the countries that we travel to. We are the first generation who witnessed the transformation into the digital age – some of us still remembering pre-smartphone times and now benefit greatly from the World Wide Web that has opened up right before our eyes.

On the other hand, we are a generation going through significant crises and challenges: climate change, migration, economic crises, demographic changes, rising extremism and so on. Also, no generation before has completed as many internships as we do these days – all too often without receiving a single penny. No generation before expected to change jobs ten times or more within a lifetime. And no generation before has been so well educated while still facing mass-scale youth unemployment.

This sense of guaranteed security that our parents believed in has become alien to us – it even scares us. What if, in spite of all our efforts, we don’t succeed, or at least, not in the way that they have defined success? They have raised us to believe that we are unique and special. And whilst we carry this with us, it puts pressure on us to live up to their expectations in a time that is so fundamentally different from the one they grew up in.

We keep on boosting our CVs, trying to outcompete others, and be better than the rest. Not out of a sense of superiority or pride, but because we are scared to fall behind, to be forgotten, and not be able to survive in a world of constant competition. We live our lives based on economic considerations. We choose fields of study, hobbies, even friends based on their value for our supposed success. Before we know it, we realise that we are not following our own interests and visions anymore, but simply, our best guess of where we think we need to be.

But does this type of life feel right? Does it feel real? Does it bring us joy and fulfilment? Does it lead to something we can be proud of? Somewhere deep down, we know the answer.

Our biggest challenge

As we can see, other generations before us have been confronted with insecurity and fear. In fact, uncertainty is a crucial element of being young, of growing up, of developing, of improving. Our challenge lies in a different regard. Yes, we are facing major problems and crises. But, at the same time, we are a generation surrounded by opportunities that were not even feasible, let alone conceivable, a few decades ago.

Our challenge is not only the problems we face. It is the vast amount of opportunities we have. This can be even scarier. Because it means that we have no excuse to just stay where we are and wait any longer. We have to constantly be on the move.

Now, we know that not everyone has the same opportunities. But we are deeply convinced that we all have some. And we all have definitely more than the generation before us. So our problem is not that there aren't any possibilities for change and improvement, but that, far too often, we are not even aware of them because we as individuals feel so powerless and small. We don't see the chances

passing by us, often because we are too scared to see them. For when we do, we won't be able to ignore them anymore. We will have to choose, and that is not an easy task.

We need to be aware that it is our generation that will rethink and redefine key aspects of life in the world that we live in today. Our ideas and our actions will shape the way our society deals with relationships, work, politics, or religion just as much as with social, cultural, and digital life. We can already feel the change happening, we just simply don't know where it will take us.

What we do know is that the first step is always the hardest because it is the one we have to take on our own. But in order to take the first step, we need to know where we're heading.

"Since I was eleven, I knew what I wanted to do. I dedicated my life to volleyball, chasing my dream to have a professional international career. By the age of 24, I had won a national championship, played in three different countries, and even managed to graduate. I knew it was just the beginning. I could see myself travelling all over the world, doing what I loved, and living life to its fullest.

Then I suffered a severe back injury. The pain was not going away. I couldn't walk properly; jumping was not even an option. Six months later, I had to face the biggest decision of my life: Do I risk my health, or do I let go of my dream?

No back pain is stronger than the pain I felt when I finally had to give up on my dream. It felt like I stopped existing. I felt lost for more than a year. I knew I needed a new direction, so I asked myself the question: What is my second most favorite thing in life?

I started following my passion for driving cars, even though I didn't know where it would take me. Once I did this, a whole new world of opportunities opened up for me, and here I am, two years later. I overcame the biggest challenge in my life and started my own personalised service for inexperienced drivers, just by answering a simple question." (Zlatin, 27, Bulgaria)

We have thought about this for some time: We need to develop a goal for ourselves, one that belongs to each one of us and that we can aspire towards. In determining this goal, we need to feel connected to others, to the people sharing their lives with us. We need to feel respected and be seen as valuable, no matter what our background or our age. We need to be taken seriously and for our ideas to be considered by others. We need structures and a system we can rely on to protect us from falling too deep into corruption and malice. We need to be able to think, explore, discover, unfold our potential, and be true to ourselves.

Most of all, we need to overcome limitations – the ones created by others – but even more so, the ones created by ourselves. We need to bring to an end our own destructive thinking, our doubts about ourselves, and our anxieties that hold us back. Instead, we should lift our heads, look at this world with a truly critical mind, overcome our fears, and find the power to take what we have learned in the past with us and head towards a future, created by ourselves – one step after another.

"I always wanted to be perfect. Shining. Special. Admired for what I am and what I do. And I thought that by the age of 30, I would have figured out exactly what that might be.

And yet, I hadn't. Instead, I was more insecure about what I wanted to do in life than ever before. In spite of a couple of prestigious jobs, I had always felt trapped in the narrow

structures of the institutions I worked for and never really felt fulfilled. In that time, a clever woman said to me: 'You should swim freely. Dare not to have a business card!' With that she touched upon one of my biggest fears. My biggest fear was not to fail at doing what I was doing, but to fail at finding what it actually was that I wanted to do.

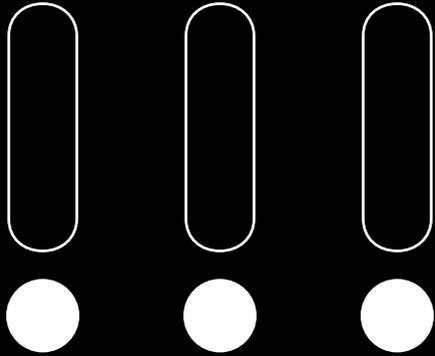
I remember one evening at a conference with all those high-ranking people in suits. The first question of every small-talk conversation was 'So, what do you do?'. And for the first time ever, all I said was 'I don't know yet. I am searching for it right now.' And, surprisingly enough, the reaction I got wasn't a frown, but more often, even an appreciating nod, sometimes almost envy that I would actually take the time to think about that really important and big question, and to simply allow myself to search.

One year later, I have learned that I don't always have to have the answers straight away. It might just be enough to simply live out the question in seeking to answer it. On this quest, I did what I have always liked, listened to my gut, spoke to a lot of other people, and simply tried out different things. In the end, I would never have been able to foresee the path that I am on right now – I have founded an agency for projects that aim to connect people, cultures, and countries in Europe and strengthen our knowledge about and our empathy towards each other.

This might not be the one and only answer to my question of who I want to be and what I want to do, but it has definitely brought me closer. And maybe being perfect isn't what I'm aiming for, after all. Instead of planning who I want to be, I have started to simply live a bit more as who I already am – perfectly imperfect." (Katharina, 31, Austria)

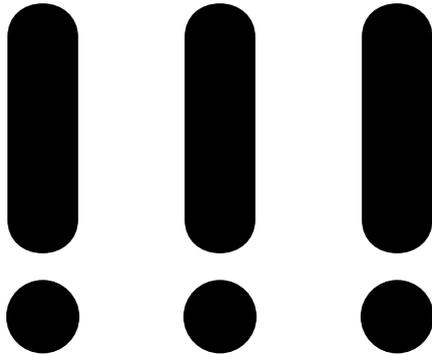
step 1

be critical



step 1

be critical



We have finished our lunch by now. While the train crosses a beautiful bridge, a former Roman aqueduct, we take a look down the river that meanders peacefully into the distance. There, at the horizon, we can see the sparkling blue of the sea. It is still more of a feeling, but we are getting closer to it every minute. Thoughtfully observing the scenery and realising the openness of a landscape that has no limits, one of us comments: “Do you ever get the feeling that it is difficult to find your own place in such a big world? How can I express my own thoughts and ideas with so many others doing the same?”

Ideas – Our biggest asset

Ideas are the best resource we all have. They are the foundation of everything. Ideas can have a transformative power, which is why it is always worth sharing them. Even if only one in a thousand ideas might actually go somewhere, this one idea can change everything. Often enough, the solution to any seeming problem has been so simple, yet so brilliant that nobody has thought about it before. Do you know the story about the American space agency NASA spending hundreds of thousands of dollars to develop a pen that writes in space, while the cosmonauts from the Soviet Union simply brought a pencil?

Even though society suggests that creativity is limited to artists, designers, and to exceptional entrepreneurs, they are not the only ones coming up with good ideas. They can come from anyone,

anywhere, and at any time. Albert Einstein came up with his relativity theory while hanging out in a patent office in Bern, Ludwig Wittgenstein used his time in battles during World War I to write his treaties, and at the beginning of the 20th century, Coco Chanel dared to go against all conventional fashion by convincing the world that women could wear pants, too.

Ideas move us forward like this train does right now. At the same time, destructive thinking will keep us back and prevent us from living the lives we want to live. Nobody can take your thinking from you, even if they want to. In the end, it will be you, your thoughts, your ideas, and, ultimately, your decisions that will manifest themselves in your life. And this can turn out well or badly for you. It depends on your readiness to think critically. It took us a while to really grasp the fullness of this concept. Maybe our thoughts here can be of help to you.

A critical mind

What does it mean to think critically? Simply put, it means to take nothing for granted. Our thinking is constantly bombarded by influences from the outside world whilst we are trying to make up our minds regarding all sorts of topics; ranging from the style of clothes we choose, to our opinions on conflicts in the Middle East. Even if you try to escape these external influences, you will hardly succeed. We hear other peoples' opinions, listen to so-called experts, chat with strangers as well as with friends, read magazines, books and blogs, watch films and series, and so on. These influences have a huge effect on what is going on in our heads. We entertain thoughts, perspectives, and opinions that might not even be our own, but rather, something we have taken on from somewhere else – often without even being aware of doing so.

Being critical means just that; becoming aware of these influences and reconsidering our thoughts and opinions accordingly.

It means to simply let a notion go through your own head first, to try to understand it, where it comes from, what it might want to achieve, where its faults may lie. It means to test concepts and opinions carefully, and distinguish between the ideas holding you back and the ones inspiring you to move on. Overall, it means finding your own beliefs, not the ones someone else whispers into your ear. This, however, isn't as easy as it sounds.

"I always wanted to start my own business. Mainly driven by the motivation to gain independence from my fragile family situation at that time and to receive confirmation, at the age of 22, friends and I started a beverage company, which quickly took over most part of my life. I soon found myself in the middle of an intense entrepreneurial life, full of ups and downs.

For an outsider, it must have seemed exhilarating, travelling the world and building a career on my own. However, I didn't feel happy, which grew stronger over time. After a couple of years, the work had taken its toll on me: I had lost contact with most of my friends and my body showed clear symptoms of exhaustion. But worst of all, I simply felt a big void inside of me.

I found myself asking: What am I doing here? I began to realise that I had tried to live a life that wasn't mine in the first place, guided by motives and habits that weren't in line with my idea of a purposeful life. I had become somebody I never wanted to be.

It took me a year and a half of intense struggle between my search for financial security and the urge to follow my personal interests – a classic dilemma that shows how hard it is when making crucial life decisions. Finally, I found the strength to stop what I was doing and start all

over again. I left the company, re-enrolled in university, and began to pursue topics that were truly mine. Now, I am talking with young people about our generation, society, and Europe and am at a constantly growing stage of peace with my family, friends, partner, and, most importantly, myself." (Martin, 29, Germany)

The decision is yours!

It is quite helpful to realise that our own critical thinking is incredibly enlarged when speaking with others. Other human beings will always be your best teachers for thinking critically, for strengthening your creative capacities, and opening your mind to new ideas. Engaging in conversations with people from as many different backgrounds as possible will always enrich you, even if you do not necessarily agree with them. This is one of the major opportunities we young Europeans share with one another. When you talk to other young people from the countries around you, you will sharpen your mental skills, learn about new points of view, and become a more reflective, critical thinker.

But no matter how many people you talk to, you will always have the last word in your own decision-making process. Nobody can make a decision for you. You will always have the freedom to choose. Doesn't that feel empowering? However, often enough, we forget about this decision-making power – we decide based on other people's thoughts. This can lead to problems, because, in the end, it will be you who has to bear the consequences of your (or really their) decisions.

We have all experienced an array of emotions, ranging from love and enthusiasm, to despair and anxiety. On this rollercoaster between joy and despair, you might have noticed that your own emotions can sometimes be the biggest danger for your critical thinking.

We have all made decisions based on personal attachments and rejection, our own tastes, or simply, fear. We rely on given pieces of information because we're ashamed to look stupid or rude when asking for their sources. We adopt the ideas shared by those around us without questioning their validity, often because we want others to like us. If you don't experience this, then you are clearly ahead of us! But chances are, you know what we're talking about. By blindly trusting others, we actively outsource our own thinking. We willingly give up our own power and influence.

Our emotions cloud our judgment and can minimise the chance for us to think critically. Critical thought, therefore, requires us to set our emotions aside and take all options into consideration. This is a high skill and no one in our group seems to have mastered it to the degree that we would like, but yes, it seems worth striving for.

Never stop asking

There's someone whose book might be worth taking a leaf out of. Although not the most recent or modern of fellows, the Greek philosopher Socrates had quite an unconventional approach when it came to being critical. As he didn't get along with his wife, he preferred to stay away from home, which was only to our best benefit, since this left him more time to roam the streets of Athens and talk to strangers, neighbours, and other citizens. Usually, these conversations did not go too well. Why? Simply because Socrates would ask the most unheard-of questions: Why do you think it is important to go to work or to earn money? What is true happiness? How can money satisfy you? Why are you so dependent on your looks? What is true beauty? He questioned everything other people assumed to be the natural way of doing things.

Today, this questioning style is called the Socratic method. But back then, people were less amused and Socrates increasingly provoked the anger of those around him. It occurs to us that this would not

be so different if it were to happen today. Finally, he was tried and sentenced to death for nothing more than asking uncomfortable questions.

There are some important lessons that can be drawn out of this. It certainly proves that critical thinking has often been perceived as a dangerous quality, something that challenges an existing system. But how else might you change a system for the better without questioning its core principles and foundations? We can't. Therefore, we shouldn't be discouraged by Socrates' fate, but rather, get inspired by his relentless efforts to keep asking those important, maybe uncomfortable questions. If we do that, even only occasionally, we will be able to better understand the world we live in and find ways to improve it.

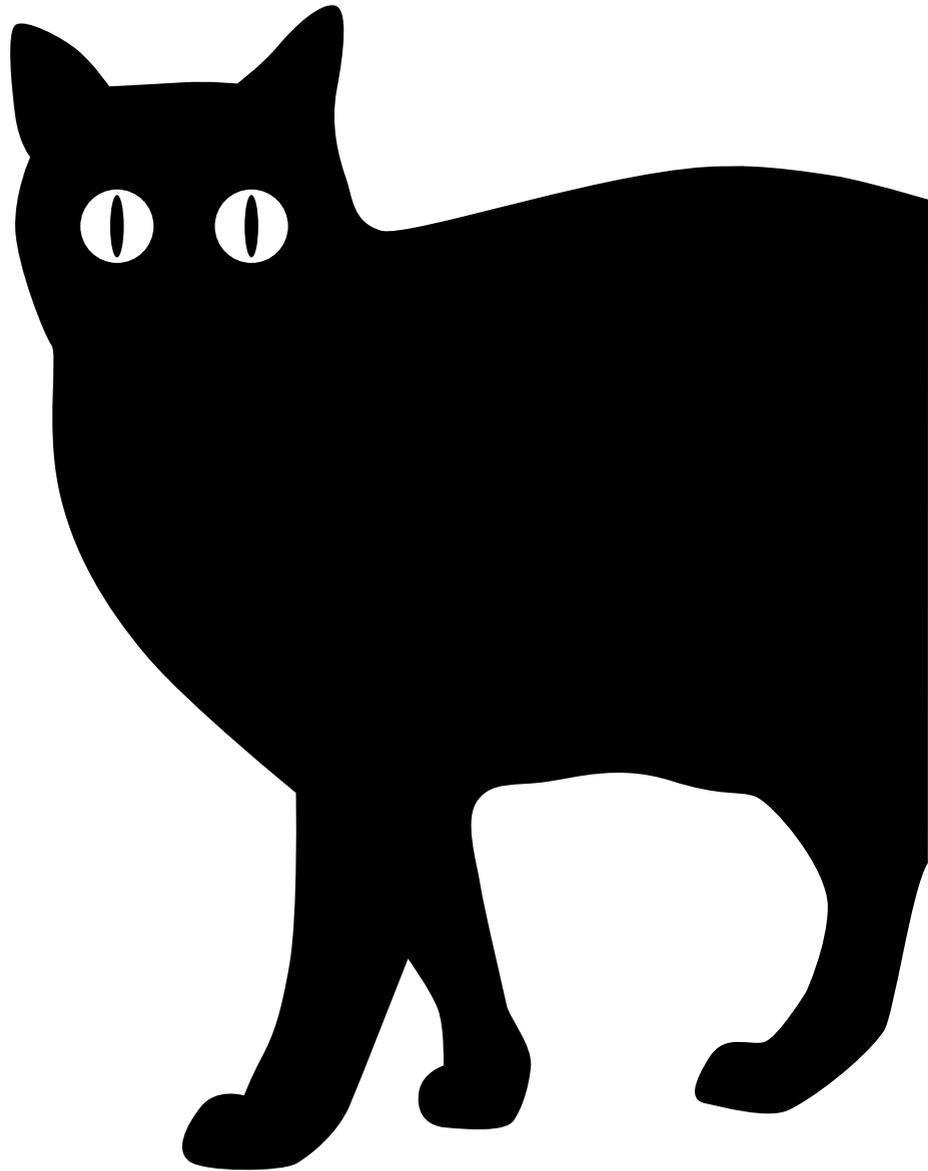
Our dear companion, before the night falls, let us underline this one thought, maybe the most important of all: **The way you think has real-life consequences.**

Thinking, no matter in what direction, will not simply stay in your head, but will directly affect your actions, relationships, work, and simply every aspect of your life. So never let anyone stop you from thinking as creatively, as critically, and as independently as possible. By discovering your own thinking and your own voice as your biggest assets, you start to see the world more like it is, not like we are often made to believe. Start being critical, so you can make your own choices. Start being critical so you can take power over your own life!

step 2

overcome your fears





step 2

overcome your fears

By now, we only see the darkness of night when looking out the windows. Looking deep down, we can faintly see an obscure coastline, where rough waves break over the sharp rocks. Light rain sends its drops down the glass. The melodic drumming of the now increasing downpour puts us in a sleepy mood. The conductor opens the door, asking if we need anything before going to sleep. Once he is gone, we are alone, with the soft yellow light overhead, the sound of the rain, and the even surge of the train running on its tracks.

In the night, our train jolts occasionally. The door of our compartment squeaks and creaks. Heavy steps can be heard of those walking up and down the aisle. The rain pounds against the windows, almost as if trying to break them. All of this seems to be out of our control. It is almost scary, and a tingling feeling runs down the spine. When asleep, you may start to have confusing dreams. Soon enough, coming out of the dark and the unknown, they pop up, waiting for you – your deepest fears.

You actually know them quite well; they seem to be constant companions in life. The sweat on your forehead when you realise you don't have the answers to the exam in front of you. Your stomach contracting from the inside when you feel powerless and weak whilst facing a difficult choice. The urge you have to simply go back to bed and cover your uncertain thoughts with sleep. It takes up all of your attention; it can absorb all of your energy. It makes you feel like your heart is always beating faster. You cannot ignore your heart; you simply cannot ignore your fears.

We live in a world that gives all too much reason to be fearful. There are severe threats covering our planet. But these aren't even the ones we are most worried about. We worry little about running out of water as a result of climate change, or the consequences of an ageing population on a social security system.

We worry about our schoolmates being more 'successful' than us. We worry about our image on social platforms. We are scared of making the wrong decision when it comes to choosing our future studies. We are scared of being alone. We are scared of not having enough time for our family, parents, or kids. We are scared of never being able to move out of our parents' place, or not getting that wanted promotion to get a bigger and better apartment. We are scared of not knowing what we want in life. We are scared of not being happy.

The fear of failure

Most of all, we are scared of failing – because no university ever teaches us how to fail. But life does, eventually. It takes time and it is usually painful.

Every single failure we have experienced makes us feel like a failure ourselves: It makes us seem powerless and weak. It drags us down. There is nothing we can do about it. It is simply too much for us. We are just not good enough...

Does any of this sound familiar? Have you heard these voices before? Have your parents made you feel this way? Your friends, teachers, someone you admired? We should realise that most of our fears are not just our own convictions, but experiences we had in the past that have stuck with us. They might have been insults, or even minor, off-hand comments made by the people who are closest to us.

If you have ever heard voices of doubt or fear inside your head, do one thing next time they come up – listen closely! Yes, listen. But this time, do it consciously and try to actually hear what those voices are saying. Who are they, and what the hell are they talking about?

Fear is a pretty bad counsellor as it tends to be unspecific, loud, and often addresses things that are alien to us. It is a human trait to be scared, a biological mechanism to protect us. Therefore, you have to actually give your fears a moment of attention and figure out what and who they are, and where they have come from.

So, let aside the fear of being foolish and childish for a moment. Go, do a little exercise with us. Visualise your very own personal fears, as detailed as possible. Give them a character. Give them a face. Give them a tone of voice. If you want to, take a pen and paper and make a drawing of them. Or, stand in front of the mirror and pretend to be every single one of them. No matter what you need, just get to know what your fears are.

"In my case, fear actually had my very own face. When I was 18, I had a tough decision to make. Due to an uneven growth of my facial bones, I was given two options by my doctors: I could either wait 10-15 years and see if my bones would grow to deform my face, causing health-related problems, or undergo a delicate surgery straight away, despite considerable pain and the risk of losing the feeling of my face forever.

It was one of the scariest moments of my life, imagining myself in either of the two situations. But the decision had to be made and nobody else could make it for me. And when I finally did, my fear disappeared. The day before the operation, my mum asked me, 'Are you afraid?' and

I said, 'I don't care.' In that moment, my fear didn't play a role any more. I had confronted it, and it felt okay.

After the operation, my mouth was sealed with a thread for two months. I had to live on a liquid diet and could barely speak. I was dependent on my mother for the most basic needs. But as horrific as the idea of this situation had seemed before, there was so much positivity in it. When my body was so weak, my mind was so alive. In that time, I got to know myself in a profound way. It taught me how much strength one needs to show their weaknesses and to accept someone else's help. It taught me how strong I was.

Seven years after the surgery, I can say that it was one of the most enriching times in my life. It not only redefined my face, but also my personality, my inner self. Only because I dared to walk straight down the path of my biggest fears.”
(Giulia, 25, Italy)

Challenge accepted!

It can be pretty interesting to finally have a chance to meet your fears in person – on a blind date, so to say. Given that you have already taken your relationship so far, you can now work on how you connect to each other.

Don't be too harsh on your fears; they have accompanied you for quite some time. Rather, just tell this bunch of funny-looking weirdoes screaming scary things at you that you are okay with them being around. You don't have to avoid them. You can choose to accept them and still pursue your goals. You do not have to let them be your excuses any more. Just take them along whilst jumping into the unknown. Dare to be imperfect. Leave your comfort zone. Take down your guard for a moment, and be just the way you are.

You might be surprised. More often, the things that scare you the most eventually turn out to be rather harmless once you face them. The fear you struggle with beforehand might be bigger than the one that is left when you finally face your obstacles.

"I've always felt that the world of politics and power has been out of reach. I'm certain that everyone has opinions, and many of us have no problem expressing them - just look at Facebook or Twitter - but what can we do to influence the people who have the power to change things?"

Two years ago, when I was 17 years old, a few friends and I tried to do something about this. We decided to organise a conference for young Europeans in Stockholm. To make the conference the best it could be, we wanted to have good venues and speakers. Being responsible for contacting external parties was a daunting task.

Who was going to listen to a 17-year-old? Who was going to let us have their hall for free? And why would a politician even respond to a group of young people asking them to speak in front of a group of other young people, for free? It seemed impossible; a fantastic idea, yet unattainable.

I spent at least 4 hours polishing every sentence of the first e-mail. And of the second, and of the third. But we started to get positive responses. Whatever we think of politicians, they were willing to come and to listen. Even the Swedish parliament let us use their chamber for free.

We had a successful conference and the experience has given me the confidence to do things I otherwise wouldn't - apply for a job with a political party in my second language, work with 16-17-year-olds at a summer camp, and complain when I was treated unfairly.

Basically, I've learnt that we should never be afraid to reach out and communicate with those we feel are out of reach. Powerful authorities can seem intimidating - but only if we don't talk to them or challenge them."
(Phelan, 19, Sweden/United Kingdom)

We are not going to lie to you. Just because you have made peace with your fears doesn't mean that you won't have to deal with them any more. But maybe you won't see them as such bad enemies when you choose to face them.

The power of failure

Remember when you were a baby? Unfortunately, most of us don't, which is a shame. We could learn quite a bit from ourselves, back then we were pretty fearless and unaware of all those dangers in the world. As a result, we kept on failing all the time – for entire days, even weeks or months. And then, finally, we could say a word. We could walk. We accomplished something!

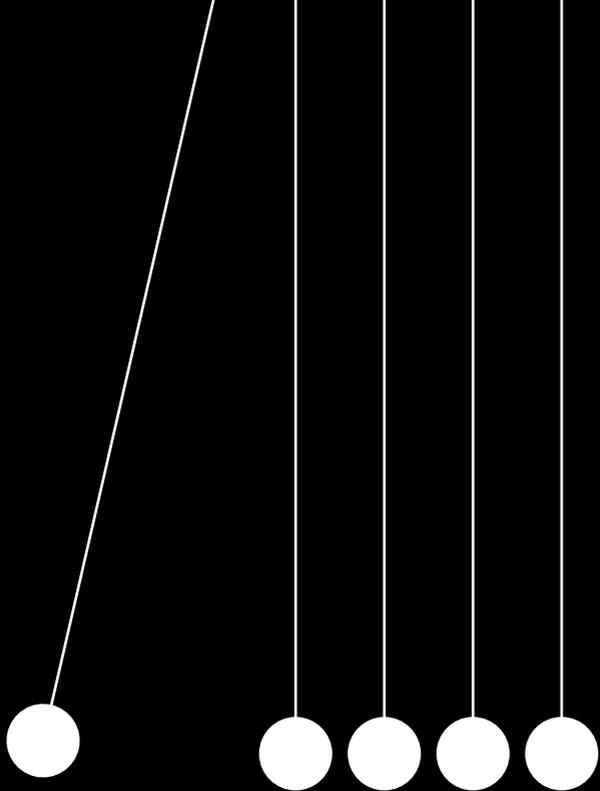
Ever since, our failures have been around us; sometimes they are with us every day, sometimes we don't see them for months. And the older we get, the more we see them for what they really are – good teachers. They show us where we still need to improve. No matter how painful their lessons might be, they can help us turn in the right direction. Most importantly, our failures remind us not to give up, but to try again.

An attempt might not always be a success, but success always grows out of an attempt.

Take athletes. They will fail a hundred times, they will end some of their days miserably as the lights of the stadium turn off around them. No one will remember them on those days. But the next days will always offer them a fresh start to try again. This is a reality for all of us.

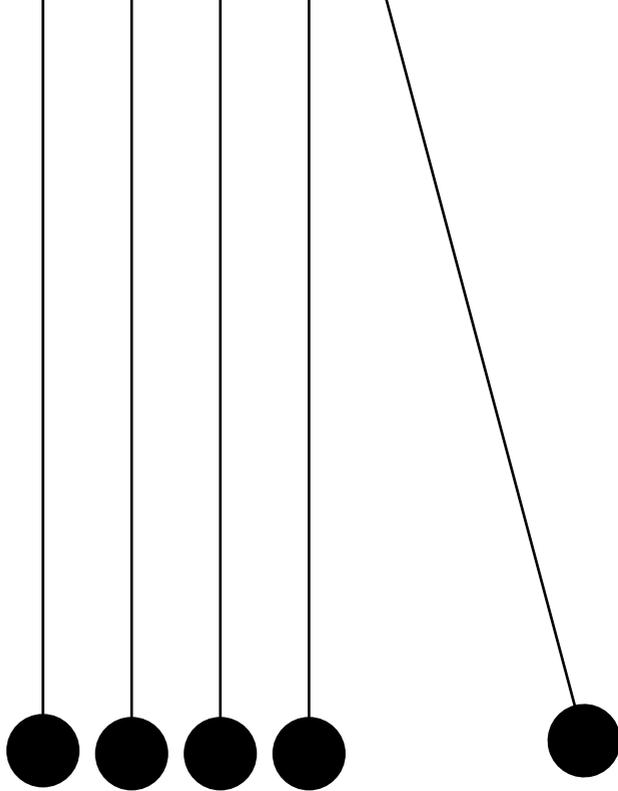
We all perform, we fail, and no one really notices – until a very special moment. The moment when we have left our fears aside and our failures are not playing with us anymore. The moment when, suddenly, all of the things we were scared of come together and form this whole new feeling – accomplishment.

When you have reached that moment of satisfaction, listen to your heart again. Listen to the racing beat of it, the pure joy and excitement. You will notice that it doesn't feel all that different from the racing beat of fear, after all.



step 3

discover your power



step 3

discover your power

As the morning is breaking, we wake up, step out of our compartments, and take in the view. The rain is gone and a fresh warm sun is highlighting breathtaking scenery – the Alps. These mountains remind you of those people who are brave enough to climb them, those who listen to their own inner voices, who listen to their intuition, and do not fear. These people are truly powerful.

“I've got the Power!”

When we feel our heart beating with a thump of satisfaction, every beat reminds us of our strength, our determination to face our fears, our growth as a person. This feeling of accomplishment is power.

Thinking about power, we are taken back to the 90s. The German pop group “Snap” is playing on the radio, long before the days of digital downloads. In the midst of European dance fever and mass consumption of pop culture, young people in multi-coloured tracksuits, dungarees, and wearing hair scrunchies proclaimed, “I’ve got the Power!”. Singing into hairbrushes, on dance floors, in nightclubs, in bedrooms. If you missed this, fear not, with a quick Internet search YouTube can introduce you to the song, to the 90s, and to the ‘power.’

But what about today? Have you ‘got the power?’ Do you feel connected to your power? Take a moment to think about this.

What is power? Do you have power? Notice how you feel in thinking about it. What comes to your mind first?

You have an important impact

Too often, the personal realm seems to be of little importance in a world with over seven billion people. It can feel like, no matter what changes you make, nothing will happen or can be influenced. We all know the feeling of being passive victims of circumstance. We all feel like that at certain points in our lives. For some, this might be all they've ever known.

We also all know people, one person or many, who do things and who work to change things. These are the people who bounce back when they fall and are even stronger than before. They seem to have access to some kind of secret knowledge. Some are able to accept their innate power and use it, and are able to connect to a sense of purpose with every decision, with every action. They realise that nobody gives you power, but that you have to take it for yourself.

"I was 23, enjoying my life, in a job that I loved, and having great times with great friends. I saw myself as an independent and empowered woman. Then I fell in love, and over the intense six month period that followed, I was entangled in a relationship that stripped me of my social connections, my energy, my confidence, and, ultimately, my self-esteem and love of life. After a few critical incidents, it became clear to me that I was in an abusive relationship.

I wanted out, but I didn't know how, I was scared and felt alone. I didn't know who I was anymore or how to find myself again. After persuasion, I met up with close friends I had become disconnected from. Speaking through

tears, they shared their hurt in knowing I was hurting, and with loving conviction they demanded that I put myself first, helping me see that I had a way out. Joining forces with friends in other cities, they all helped me to find the strength to cut this person out of my life, there and then.

I then began to connect with myself again – with my inner power. I found the strength to take power back, take action to get out of the relationship, and regain control of my life.

It took time to rebuild my life and to feel like myself again, but the Zara I discovered – the person I am today – is far stronger and wiser than before.

A close colleague that I looked up to, who had been a critical friend during this time, later told me that my courage to show my vulnerability, recognise my own worth, and take action had inspired her to also take action and leave a long- term abusive relationship of many years.

Although I wouldn't ever want to relive that time of my life again, I am certain that I wouldn't take the experience away. It has helped to shape the woman I am now." (Zara, 29, Scotland)

Doing what you can

It might seem like a strange idea – having power we didn't know we had. But the truth is, power is always there, waiting to be discovered, waiting to be used. If you want to find yours, ask yourself: Do you get involved when you think that something isn't quite right? Do you make an effort to change things in your personal life? Cheesy as it sounds: Do you seize the opportunities that come your way, and if not, do you even bother to go looking for them?

A funny thing about opportunities is that, quite often, they don't show their faces at first, but prefer to disguise themselves as the guests that we wouldn't extend our warmest of welcomes to.

"I have always been passionate about making a change in my country: Georgia – a country in the corner of Europe that no one seems to care about. It was in the summer of 2008 that I found myself in the epicentre of a war. Together with my parents, we were driving through black smoke and artillery fire. Seeing bodies on the street through the blasted windows of our car, I contemplated the possibility of dying right there, right then.

What power did I have in that powerless situation? My heart was thumping and in the midst of this suddenly told me, 'Who, if not you, and when, if not now?!' In the middle of chaos and fire, I realised what my purpose was going to be from that second onwards. I knew that this was the defining moment of my life, and with previously unknown clarity, I realised that if I did not take action, nobody else would.

Other than my own perspective and a camera, I had nothing. I told myself: 'If I survive this, I'll dedicate my life to protecting my country's independence, democracy, and security, making sure my fellow Georgians will not have to go through this nightmare again.'

Just a few months before, I had the opportunity to meet German Chancellor Angela Merkel in person. Breaking the protocol, I said to her: 'As a representative of the Georgian people, I ask you to support my country during the upcoming NATO summit.' This unexpected request by a 15-year-old seemed to throw her off for a moment.

As the war erupted around me, I learned an important lesson: True power does not always come with those in power, but is very often right at the tips of our fingers. My family and I survived that brutal war day, and I have since kept true to the promise I made to myself – to support and represent my country.

Five years later, I returned to the place where I almost lost my life, yet discovered my purpose. This time, I was singing the Georgian national anthem in front of the nation, the armed forces, and relatives of those killed during the war. It was an important milestone in my life, but also marked the first steps in my lifelong journey to do everything I can for my country. I have found my own power." (Nini, 22, Georgia/Germany/Hungary)

Power goes online

Today, we can easily unleash our power. Globalisation and communication technologies ensure that we all can share ideas and plant seeds for change that others can see, read, and follow.

Think of our generation. We spend so much time online. If little kittens falling over their own tails can get millions of likes, then our ideas should make it, too! We can write, take photos, shoot videos. We can spread our ideas and gain support. Even though the Internet will not change everything, it can, when used in the right way, be the starting point, the first step to getting people to act.

Take the protests in Istanbul in 2013. People mobilised through Twitter and used it as the main source for live news. It was considered even more reliable than the mainstream press, which is often criticised for its self-censorship. Young people exercised power that many of them probably didn't know they had. They took democracy into their own hands and took to the streets. Realising the

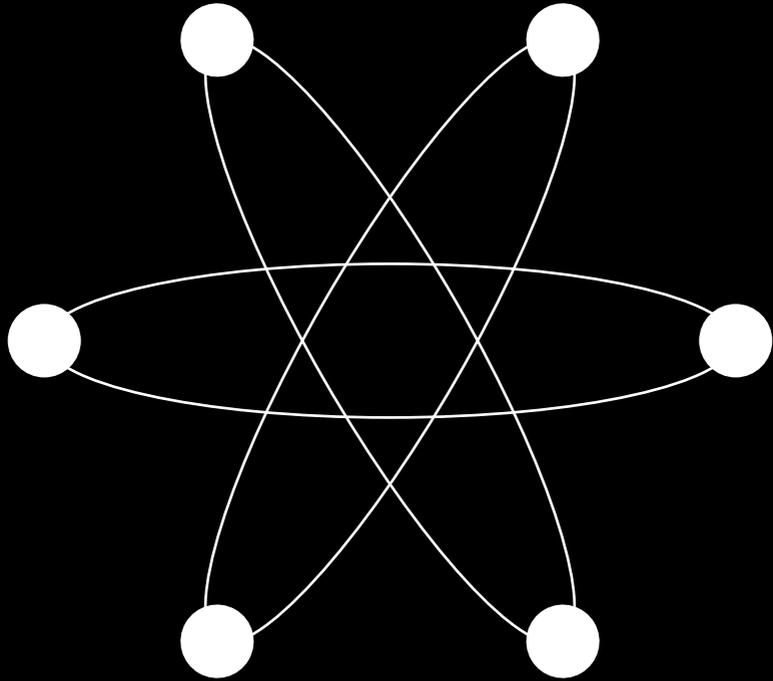
power of these people when using social media, the Turkish Prime Minister went so far as to shut Twitter down at one point in 2014.

But we don't all have to start a revolution. Whether our online or offline behaviour results in protesting, voting, or turning off our lights to save energy, it's a success. In these ways we can unite our voices and bring people together. We've 'got the power,' and we're making a change.

So take your power and make your change!

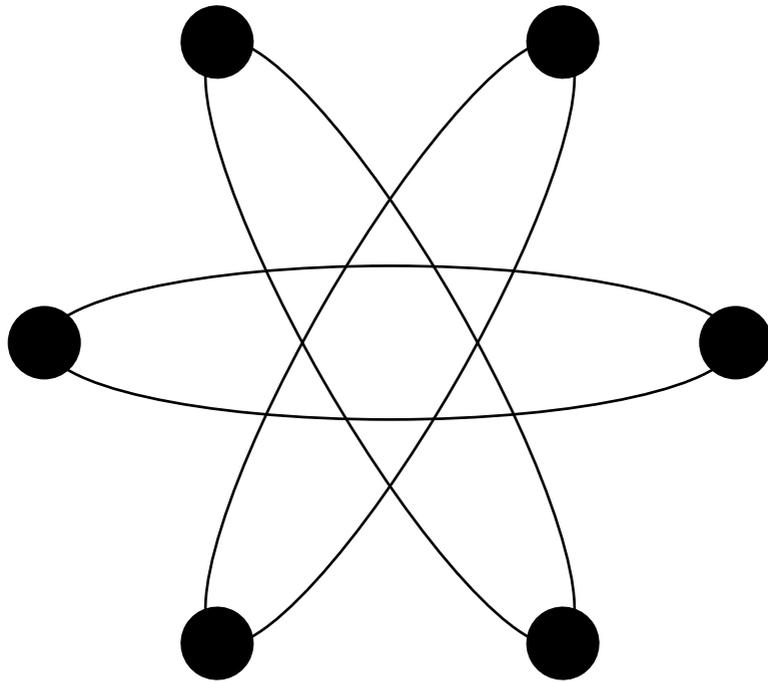
step 4

group up



step 4

group up



The train has entered into a big city now. Beautiful houses line up outside our windows. We see little balconies, carefully decorated with green plants and colourful flowers. We come by a marketplace filled with people chatting, talking about items for sale, sitting on benches, playing football in the park nearby. Time to get up and find our belongings.

Taking responsibility for yourself and others

By now, we hope the thoughts on critical thinking have shown you that you have the ability to be an independent, inspiring thinker. By getting in touch with your fears, you're able to see what they might do to you, and how you can succeed without letting them define your life. You've 'got the power.' All of these insights set the stage for what is to come next.

Life, by nature, is defined by action. But all too often we watch everything pass by without responding. Life is not something we should consume passively. We are not the audience, not the observers – we are the actors, the doers, the decision-makers.

This also means that we all are responsible. Not only for ourselves, but also for other people – just as much as they are responsible for us. When we ignore a negative development that affects others, we make just as much of a conscious choice as if we were to get up and do something about it.

"In the past, I always found it hard to relate to the problems of people that weren't a part of my direct surroundings. Media news struck me, but never really touched me. That is, until I went to travel around Europe. Through this experience, I got to know young people from very different backgrounds than my own.

In Sofia, I met up with a student who told me that he was scared to never be able to make a good living and to always be seen as "second-class" due to his passport.

That conversation left me with deep thoughts about fate. Still on the schoolyard, I stopped for a moment and turned around to look at that run-down, dusty building. All the windows were barred. Behind one of them, I spotted a younger girl, looking at me. As our eyes met she waved at me from behind the bars. I returned the wave and for a moment, that was all there was. Two human beings, sharing this moment. Yet, our lives couldn't be more different. When I lost sight of her and turned around the corner, all of a sudden, I started to cry.

In this one instance, I could physically feel the heaviness of an unfair world hitting me like a brick in the head. That girl felt like the representation of all the people whose backgrounds and heritage determine their fate, rather than their innate value. Worst of all, I felt unable to do anything for her or for all the others who simply weren't born in the best of circumstances.

As I continued my travels, I kept thinking back to this moment with that girl. Through this heaviness, it became clear to me that I needed to take action.

Despite being unable to eradicate all sorts of injustices and violence, I have the resources and the opportunities at my disposal to do something. Coming from a wealthy country gives me a responsibility to look beyond my own privileged circumstances and actively find ways to help others. Ever since, I've felt the need to deliver on this promise.

When I returned, I published several articles and spoke to others about the people I met whilst travelling, sharing their stories with a wider audience. Step by step more opportunities opened up for me to be of support to other Europeans. Today, I am figuring out ways that will allow young people of various backgrounds to come together and learn from each other. This is the way I found for myself – this is my responsibility."

(Vincent, 26, Germany)

Delegating thinking to others, as we mentioned before, often also leads to delegating responsibility – the most dangerous act of outsourcing. We let others do the job: speaking up against racist or sexist comments; volunteering at a soup kitchen; helping kids struggling with their homework; or actually going overseas to tackle problems such as starvation. Too often do we blindly rely on others to solve problems for us, in our own lives and for the rest of the world. But nobody can ever take our own responsibility from us. Depending on our resources and the opportunities we have, we should step up and get engaged. And even if we have very few resources at our disposal, we can still engage in societal issues.

We do have the ability to think and act for ourselves. Let's not delegate the task of solving problems or shaping our future to anyone else but to you, and to us. Right here, right now.

Take the first steps

If you want to stand up and get out of your chair, you have to ask yourself these simple questions: What do I care about? What is my passion? What do I believe in? What talents do I have that can benefit myself and others?

These seem like rather simple questions, but all too many of us haven't found the right answers to them, and wouldn't even know where to start. Doesn't it somehow seem hypocritical to talk about change and action when we don't even know what we really care about?

"Follow your passion!" is what my mum used to say every time I had difficulties making choices: Which college to go to, what courses to take, or which city to study in. She wanted me to make my own decision, as she herself hadn't had the chance to do that. Her parents had made that choice for her – to become a nurse. And that was it.

The problem was: I didn't know what I wanted back then. I felt alone in making that decision and struggled with questions like: What am I really passionate about? In what kind of company would I fit in? What are my greatest qualities? And the biggest one: What if I make the wrong decision? I felt like my whole life's future was at stake.

In the end, my 'passion' didn't end up being something that blindsided me at a particular moment. It was a part of my life for quite some time. I've always enjoyed reading sociological theories and spreading their ideas by writing articles in comprehensive, but less abstract ways. In my twenties, I went to Palestine to tell the stories of people who can't always express themselves to wider audiences. So, it became clear that I was destined to be a writer.

To be honest, living my passion isn't always easy. It's a path that doesn't offer the best financial or job security – often living day to day. At times it can be stressful, but overall I feel fulfilled and excited about my life. I don't feel that I've chosen my passion; my passion chose me."
(Liza, 29, Belgium)

We all fall into this trap, and, unfortunately, very often, it prevents us from taking action. We expect our passion to be hanging right in front of our eyes, in big, red blinking letters. We get frustrated if it doesn't. But that is exactly the point. We shouldn't get frustrated if it isn't there already, but rather, get excited about starting to search for it!

For one moment, allow yourself to forget about the world and what it needs or wants from you. Listen to yourself instead: What skills do you get complimented on? What were the happiest moments in your life? What are things that you always wanted to try? What classes would you like to attend? Who impresses you? Which part of the newspaper do you read first? What did you want to become when you were a child? What action hero would you want to be, and what would you want to fight for or against? Or, if the big questions are more your thing: What makes you feel alive?

You don't have to have the answers straight away. Simply get going in directions that you feel drawn to. Buy a magazine that you have never read before. Sign up for an experimental dance class or a cooking course. Ask your friend who knows so much about politics to tell you more about it. Check out TED-talk videos, listen to podcasts, or subscribe to newsletters of organisations that interest you. Write an email to an author, family member, or friend who inspires you. Create a garden with your neighbours or check out where your food comes from in the supermarket. Talk to a stranger about his or her passions and life interests.

Going even further, don't put limits on yourself. Work to create unorthodox connections in your thinking between things that might not usually go together. Combine your interests. Dare to be unconventional. Follow your gut. And please, be patient with yourself. You don't have to create a new world. Just start by creating your own world, or at least a new version of it, instead.

Before you even realise it, you will have become what the world is constantly looking for – a change-maker. A change-maker is not just an almost suspiciously energetic leader of a youth organisation, or a cool social entrepreneur in a stylish co-working space. Change-makers are ordinary people who take the first steps towards changing something, no matter how big or small.

Look around you

As soon as you get moving, life might surprise you – inspiration tends to spread out and make the world come to you. At the beginning, it might just be you on your own, but you will soon see that by being inspired and believing in ideas and in action, you will attract like-minded people. So don't be shy, even if you haven't done anything yet. Talk about the things you are interested in with others; share your ideas and points of view. No matter if that first person is your grandmother, your teacher, a fellow-student, or a waiter at a bar at 3:00 in the morning. Together with others, you will be even more creative and innovative, and see paths that you might not have seen before.

The politics of your life

You'd be surprised, but this is how politics begins. Some might roll their eyes when hearing the word 'politics,' but, in the end, politics is nothing more than just that – voicing ideas and taking action in order to fulfil your own and other peoples' needs. Every action affecting others is a political action. Politics is not just government

scandals or old, grey-haired men on boring talk shows. It's not just 400-page treaties or impossible-to-understand acts. Politics is a part of our everyday life and happens right where we are and where we act; in our families, at school, at work, hanging out with friends. It's everywhere.

"Even though others would describe me as an extrovert, I sometimes talk more out of the feeling of being uncomfortable and often get a sense of loneliness. For years I was involved in plenty of youth projects and was even the president of a youth NGO – not exactly a position where you'd expect a person feeling lonely.

I know that I feel very strongly about social and political affairs. But you see, these aren't the topics most people would think of as 'sexy' enough. And this is where the loneliness kicks in. It makes me frustrated to see people around me not showing any interest in the world we live in and the problems it's facing.

At the age of 22, I decided to do something about it and to reach out to those who normally would not be willing to get involved in political discussions. I organised a series of workshops on current social and political topics for secondary school students in my hometown.

Even though not everybody has to be a debater, to me it feels so obvious that everybody should be able to formulate and verbalise their own thoughts and arrive at constructive conclusions when confronted with the opinions of others.

I know that this won't always make me the life of the party. And in the end, my involvement to make others understand why they should care about politics will probably be but a

drop in the ocean. But I will continue doing it – not because it always makes me happy, but because of a sense of duty. Since we are all indebted to society and should take an interest in being its active members, I'll always look for others who will take an interest with me. This way, we'll be in this together."

(Krzysztof, 25, Poland)

Don't leave politics to the people you hear about in the news. Claim your right to be political yourself and to engage with others. Not because you know everything about the Lisbon Treaty, or because you want to become an activist, or even a parliamentarian, but simply because you want to live your own life in a bigger context – critically, not guided by fears, and with power.

Layers of identity

We have seen by now that every journey starts with ourselves. We are the ones who decide who we want to be. Every one of us has a myriad of layers that make up who we are. We are ultimately the ones who decide which identities we will pay more attention to. So, let's have a quick look at these different layers of identity.

We can identify ourselves as hipsters, retro, or punk. We may have different circles of friends – schoolmates, work colleagues, and those who we never see. We play computer games, practice yoga, design our own blogs. We live in Kreuzberg, Châtelet, and Chueca. We are from Liverpool, Sofia, or Malmö. We are interns, waiters, or entrepreneurs. We are Latvian, Croatian, or Irish. We are Christians, Muslims, Jews, or non-believers. We are straight, gay, or don't want to fit into any box.

These are all different layers of what we understand as our identities as individuals. Every layer adds something, not contradicting, but rather, complementing the other. From the smallest of those

layers or frames of reference up to the biggest ones, an example of which we will mention right now – being European.

There are many definitions that pop up as soon as we talk about Europe. The geographical continent. The European Union. The Eurozone. And so on and so on. But Europe can be more than just a description of borders or membership status. Even politicians, however, seem to hide behind keywords like "European identity" or "European narrative", without defining what these might mean.

When you think back to Thomas's story of the landing beaches, you'll see that our common history is a big part of what binds us together in Europe. The Enlightenment was the beginning of new scientific and logical thinking; some of the world's leading figures of literature and philosophy emerged here, we equally started two of the most devastating wars on this planet, as well as one of its biggest peace projects – the European Union. Europeans have interconnected this world and oppressed it. Our history is neither our fault nor credit, but shapes who we as a continent are today.

One thing that our European history has taught us is that we might actually be more likely to have happy and peaceful lives if we work together, not against each other. And that's not always easy when you consider that there aren't many places in the world where you can find as many different countries, cultures, regions, landscapes, languages, and so on in one proportionally small geographical area. So, in a way, being European has always meant to be able – or at least to try – to deal with diversity and differences.

"I decided to spend the last year of my undergraduate studies in Bremen, Germany. Friends and family were quite surprised by my choice and talked about differences, stereotypes, polarisation, etc. At that time, the relationship between my home country, Greece, and Germany was badly strained by a financial crisis and strict austerity

measures. Some of my friends predicted that I might face verbal harassment or discrimination.

Nevertheless, even though I had no idea how things would turn out, I went ahead, packed my suitcase, and left my country on my own for the first time. The experience turned out to be deeply transformative, becoming an important landmark in my life. I actually immersed myself in the foreign culture and appreciated every opportunity to learn about other European backgrounds and mindsets. In the end, I became a fundamentally different person.

Before leaving, I wasn't really into politics, would not read the news daily, or have any kind of socio-political discussion. When I came back, inspired by my newly discovered interest in foreign cultures, I had a vivid lust to join a European youth organisation and become politically active. I deeply wished to convey what I had learned during my Erasmus year about cultural diversity and the advantages of being European, which enabled me to think from a broader perspective.

And so I did. I got involved in several NGOs, projects, and activities, all of which convinced me that it's worth fighting for certain ideals and values that we have in common. For five years now, I have been travelling between Greece and Germany. Communicating the other country's perspectives is difficult, but I am committed to bringing these cultures closer together. There is a need to build bridges, put aside what is said the media, and talk to each other." (Stylianou, 25, Greece)

This diversity is what makes "being European" most tangible in our everyday lives. Being European is the party where you go crazy with people your age from across the continent. It's the party we

write in English with our colleagues or friends from Bulgaria and Portugal. It's that small article we read about Denmark, simply because we have a friend there and want to know what's going on in her home country.

It is in this experience of exchange with people, cultures, and mentalities that we can learn, broaden our horizons, and become more open.

This is what being European adds to our identity – stepping over mental and geographical boundaries and being open to differences, whilst still looking at similarities. Being European doesn't stop at a certain border or with an institutional declaration. On the contrary, it invites us to open up, to show interest in and empathy for other people, mentalities, cultures, and countries that are different from our own. To learn about each other, get to know each other, work together, and create collectively.

Being European means that we are not alone, neither with our problems nor with our visions. Every single one of us is a piece of this huge mosaic called Europe. And only together can we actually identify the picture this mosaic will form. Europe, just like every one of us, needs to be critical, overcome its fears, and realise its power for good. And it can only do so, if we – the individual pieces that form it – start working towards it.

Just like every single one of us is constantly developing, Europe is still a work in progress. All its difficulties and all its chances are not static. Europe is alive, and it is growing, changing, and progressing. It's a train ride similar to the one we are all on right now.

We need to start viewing ourselves not as victims of events or circumstances, but as change-makers ready to tackle challenges and see them as opportunities for growth.

Only if every single one of us realises his and her individual potential can we create a Europe that we all will want to live in, full of fascination, inspiration, and unity.

A Europe based not on corruption, nepotism, or xenophobia, but on fairness, transparency, and inclusion.

A Europe guided not by greed, fear, nor doubt, but by solidarity, courage, and hope.

Start your own journey

We know that our shared journey has come to an end. We will have to address our own questions for some time, and so do you. As Europeans, we are used to saying goodbye, only to pick up where we left off, some time soon.

One after the other, we give you a hug and wish you good luck on your journeys to come: “Udanej podróży!”, “Bon voyage!”, “Goede reis!”, “καλό ταξίδι!”

The last one of us puts a small book in your hand, smiles and hurries to catch up with the others. Then we rumble off, this big loud crowd of twelve people, tired from the journey, but excited to see what awaits us in this new place.

You stand on the platform and watch us disappear in the crowd. The last thing you see is Liza’s long blond hair behind a corner, then you are on your own again – but you are not alone. You pull out the book. Attached to it you find a folded letter in hurried handwriting:

“To our new friend, some final thoughts for you:

We urge you to purposefully reject common opinions, cultures of complaining, and destructive thinking. Recognise that you are not controlled

by others, and realise that you are worth much more than your self-created image. Start defining what is truly important and unimportant to you. Start using your voice, your abilities, your potential for progress. They are more powerful than you think. Start to listen to yourself. Be more than other people’s expectations and projected images. Get to know yourself, be willing to face your weaknesses and embrace your strengths! Be open to change and listen to your inner voice! Take responsibility and embrace diversity. Take action alone and with others in order to make a difference. Most importantly, be yourself, no matter what that means to you.

In this sense, let us give you this little book as a present. It doesn’t take too long to read, but it might open up some questions, and help you to feel supported. It may even help you to find some answers.

Read it and take as much as you want out of it.

And then – write your name in the book, and pass the book on to someone else. This someone could be a friend, or a total stranger. It can be someone from your own country, or someone from far away.

We are spreading thousands of copies of this book all over Europe – see where they have gone. We are curious what journey they will make and the impact they will have.

Join us on this journey and start shaping the future.”

Who, if not you? Who, if not us?

epilogue

our story and yours



how it all started

Do you want to know where the idea for this essay came from? It all started when the two of us, Vincent and Martin, travelled across Europe. Not unlike the text itself – that takes authors and readers from one place to another – this whole endeavour would not have been possible without an actual journey.

Europe has been our home for most of our lives. Before our trip though, we quite frankly had never really experienced all that our continent has to offer. Without fully understanding the impacts of such a trip, we decided that we at least wanted to get to know more about Europe first-hand.

Funded by two German foundations, we visited 14 countries in six weeks, interviewing youth and seeing more of what Europe has to offer. It was a life-changing adventure. We spent endless hours in trains all over the continent and also travelled by bus, car, bike, and by boat. We saw stunning landscapes, tasted different foods, and experienced new cultural mindsets and ways of living.

What most impressed us, however, were the people we met.

From Spain to Bulgaria, Greece to Sweden, we experienced Europe and got to know its people in rather unique, unconventional ways. We hung out with a group of French students for wine and cheese, slept in an airport in Riga, fled a burning hotel in Rome, saw Twitter be shut down in Turkey, and talked to revolutionaries

on Euromaidan in Kyiv. The more people we met and the more conversations we had, the more we recognised that despite all our differences, we are all Europeans, united not just in our geographical location, but connected by a sense of a shared future. It doesn't matter whether one is from Stockholm or Athens, Sevilla or Lviv, young people from all over the continent have much in common.

But we also found something not-too-idealistic connecting all of us – fear. Fear regarding the future; not being good enough, smart enough, or fast enough, and not being needed or useful. What truly unites our generation in Europe is the fear of not being able to make a difference; of not being heard, and of not having the means to be part of something bigger.

While taking a ship from Barcelona to Rome, we pondered this and thought about ways to address these problems. Our initial thought was to write a letter or an essay to our generation encouraging them to not give up and to believe in themselves. We realised that such a text could only be written by a *group* of Europeans from different backgrounds, showing that, in fact, European youth can be united, and can achieve something more, together. Luckily, we had just met inspiring young women and men from all over Europe, and how better to build a young European group than through these new connections?

We met Thomas on a rainy afternoon in Paris and Styliia on a bright, sunny day in Athens. We had ice cream with Zlatin in Sofia and breakfast with Katharina in Vienna. Shortly after, still in Vienna, we talked to Nini about Georgian history and politics. We met Zara, from Scotland, and Liza, from Belgium, in Thessaloniki and met Giulia from Italy while she was finishing her degree in Berlin. We learned about Kris's enthusiasm and work in Warsaw and got in touch with Phelan through a friend in Stockholm. We couldn't have asked for a better group to write this essay, and we all became closely connected within hours of having our first meeting.

Writing an essay with twelve authors turned out to be a task in and of itself. We spent several hours talking about the implications of being European, whether or not we should take a specific political stand with our text, and what role our personal backgrounds should play. What we all agreed on was that our generation has the potential to become a generation of change-makers. We agreed that our continent needs our generation to step up, engage with issues, and find solutions. We also agreed that, often enough, young people are not lacking the conviction or interest, but rather, are lacking self-assurance and motivation. This is at the core of our text. We hope our experiences dealing with frustration, fear, apathy, and discouragement will be of help to others out there.

Needless to say, this essay is the culmination of our team's efforts to support our generation and Europe. Most of us are planning to spend our lives helping Europe or European youth, engaging in politics and society, and overcoming the hurdles that may try to prevent us from doing so. What we have found is that being committed to a cause is always easier when working with others. It is our hope that this essay will also help you connect with other young Europeans, engage in dialogue, and share ideas and visions. We know that our generation has enormous power within us and that we can (and should) unlock this power – together.

We invite you to join us in our efforts, get in touch, and also help others to unfold their potential.

Let's live the best and most purposeful lives possible.

Vincent-Immanuel Herr & Martin Speer

Berlin, October 2015

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Get to know us

Authors

Vincent-Immanuel Herr

Vincent is a full-time idealist from Berlin. He is convinced that good ideas have a transformative effect on people and can truly change lives – so long as we find the courage to see them through. He wants to dedicate his life to bettering society by helping others and solving social issues. His motto is: “Use your voice. If you don’t, nobody else will do it for you.”

Martin Speer

Martin is an observer and a questioner from Berlin. He believes in the power of good questions and unconventional answers. He loves to connect people and build strong networks. Besides having an entrepreneurial spirit, he is an economist and an active European who wants to commit his life to the future of the continent.

Katharina Moser

Katharina is a believer in empathy from Vienna, Austria. She is convinced that curiosity and understanding are the basis for a functioning cooperation between countries in Europe. On her path to follow this vision, she has jumped in at the deep end and now aims to become one of those trendy entrepreneurs in an inspiring co-working space. Now she can call all of her European projects business instead of 'scattered multitasking' and work on them in full daylight, not just on the side, 'after work'.

Krzysztof Ignaciuk

Kris is a pragmatic dreamer from Poland currently living in Berlin. He is a great believer in civic education and the positive effects that more equality has on everyone's well-being. Some part of him still wants to change the history of rock music or become a writer, but he hasn't had the time for that lately.

Liza Noteris

Liza is a critical thinker from Belgium who can get lost in a library for hours. She reads fiction and non-fiction, always trying to find deeper meanings and societal trends. She is more interested in the sociology of the European integration than in taking a political stance. Liza is always up for a laugh and loves meeting new people. Her motto is: "You don't search for friends, you recognise them."

Zlatin Georgiev

Zlatin is an enthusiastic manager with innovative thinking from Sofia. He likes to work with motivated people, so he does everything in his power to influence people in positive ways. He is also an ex-professional volleyball player with a great passion for achievements. An international environment is what he thrives in.

Thomas Goujat-Gouttequillet

Thomas is an active citizen from France, always fighting for his first love – Europe. Driven by his passion for honesty and equality, he takes inspiration from the diverse communities that he is immersed in. He never says no to a cool-sounding project and strives every day to be a better activist, co-worker, and friend.

Stylia Kampani

Stylia is a long-suffering European coming originally from Europe's southernmost island, Crete. She is convinced that everyone has a secret power to unleash and wants to help people discover that power. For her, purpose in life means to accept challenges and test one's comfort zone: This may lead to failure at times, but who cares – your life is the best teacher.

Zara Kitson

Zara is a dreamer and a grafter (Scottish for someone who works hard). Coming from a working-class background of miners, she is passionate about social and environmental justice, equality, and democracy. She does what she can, and where she can, to bring about change and help create a world that works for us all.

Nini Tsiklauri

Nini is a passionate change-maker who grew up in Hungary and Germany. Nini's heart beats, however, for her home country of Georgia – she doesn't shy away from any opportunity to support her people and family there. She is also an extrovert in the truest meaning of the word and finds relaxation on stage or in front of a large crowd.

Giulia Zeni

Giulia has studied diplomacy only to understand that diplomacy must change. She believes the most ambitious European projects can succeed if people don't hide behind walls of formalities, but treat each other as persons, rather than parts of institutions. Giulia is an Italian who lives in Berlin and dreams to become a writer. In the meantime, she engages in what inspires her.

Phelan Chatterjee

Phelan is a Londoner and Stockholmer in equal measure. He spends most of his time reading articles and getting angry at oppressions, inequalities, and the efforts of politicians to make our continent a divided, closed-minded, and hostile place. He believes in the creative power of young people to smash borders and make a difference, not least by tapping into the flows of the Internet.

Copy Editor

Amy Baldauf

Amy is a sociologist and peace researcher with both American and Finnish citizenships. She is interested in implementing ideas, tackling global issues, and initiating transformative change. She believes that Europe as an idea is in flux, and not only includes those native to it, but those who are taking part in its modern narrative.

Communications

Antje Scharenberg

Antje is an enthusiastic idealist who likes to ask questions and think of solutions. She is passionate about learning, debating, and sharing knowledge, as she believes that critical thinking can get us closer to a more just society. When she's not reflecting on the state of Europe and its young generation, she spends her time in London's museums or entertains herself with German literature.

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