



## More regionalism, more Europe!

We, young activists from FYEG and EFAY, have gathered in Tolmin (Slovenia) in November 2008, in order to discuss the role of regionalism while shaping the future of Europe. After a whole week of debate, we reached the common position reflected in this document.

This topic has now been discussed as a result of the need to rethink Europe and world wide problems in this time of global crisis; (economical, ecological and social). We are also aware that the European construction is facing an identity crisis, due to the perceived distance between citizens and the institutions that frame our every day lives.

Regionalism is necessary. European integration is continuously evolving and thus the objectives of the EU need to be redefined to give answer to new challenges of a changing world. Nowadays, with twenty seven countries the European Union covers more policy area than ever before; however the organization of the EU has not been structurally reformed since its extension. Hence, a real democratic structure must be implemented, including a real representation of regions. We are convinced that reinforcing regions, together with reinforcing European and global networks, is the best way to create a true green, social and democratic reform. Proximity politics offer a framework of better accountability on decision making that leads to more effective policies.

Regionalism is a right. Europe has great diversity that reaches far beyond state borders. The patchwork of cultural, natural and historical regions is what forms the European identity. Therefore, European unity lies in acknowledging and empowering its diversity. People have the right to speak their own language, learn about their own history in schools, and be able to live their own culture and traditions. It is a community's right to feel part of a nation, without the denial of its existence and to decide its own political framework, rules and future.

The great diversity of regions is the hidden richness of Europe. Furthermore, regions, nations, countries and states are concepts in constant evolution<sup>1</sup>. Europe's dynamic political history, including the use of the right to self determination, has depicted the continent as we know it today. This has changed the way that citizens relate to each other to a point where the main goal for the development of our society is a more participative democracy through more empowered regions. Acknowledging the path that has built our present reality is the way to break mental barriers in shaping our future.

The claim of historic nations over centuries for self government and autonomy has led to some achievements. Although there is still a lot more to be accomplished, these should be a reference for other regions that still strive for a higher recognition and more competences (e.g. legislative power or tax autonomy). Regions and historical nations should cooperate and work together to exchange best practices for mutual and collective benefit. Empowering regions is empowering Europe.

Regionalism and progressive nationalism are about looking to the future, not only preserving the past. Conserving the culture, language and heritage of them is actually important. Nevertheless, we think that the region is also the best tool between the citizens and Europe; for defending human rights, applying green policies and giving a human feel Europe. Having autonomy on the regional level is the best way for having a root – basing policies on economic affairs, protection of the environment and social justice, developing them not top down but bottom up instead. All this is connected to a new understanding of a word in the EU agenda - subsidiarity. For us subsidiarity implies proximity,



democracy and a local approach. In a multilevel democracy the most important thing is enlarging consensus as much as possible, being inclusive with all the layers that serve the citizens.

In order for the regions to be empowered and fairly represented they must have binding decision-making capacities within the EU institutions. On the other hand we believe that the EU deserves real and properly defined legislative and executive powers in order to be a proper and clear democratic institution and achieve a real People's Europe. In this sense, democratic parties should view regionalism as a chance for a brighter and deeper democratic system in order to consolidate the role of the peoples in decision making in the whole structure of the European Union.

Regionalism does not exclude any other feeling or belief. It is a positive movement that contributes to the exchange and enjoyment of diversity. Inclusion of newcomers in the local community, making them participants of cultural heritage and language is one of the most recent challenges, especially for regions and historic nations. Transmitting to the new generations the humanistic background of the peoples of Europe -with its inherited culture, values and defence of human rights- must not compromise respect of diversity and will adapt to new times.

Finally, regionalism should go hand in hand with the globalization process: the alter globalization. We also should view Europe as a region in the world and take in to account its relations across the globe when reinventing itself. A Europe more conscious about its diversity is a Europe more responsible towards the world.

Given this shared vision we, members of FYEG and EFAY, commit ourselves to defend the following:

- The need for inclusive regionalism, as opposed to a narrow minded and offensive approach. Regionalist and progressive nationalist movements look resolutely to the future, while being conscious of its past and experiences.
- Clear support for the right to self determination for people around the world. More than a simple right, the will of people to stand together and to share a common destiny is an obvious factor for personal involvement in political decisions and public life. We stand for humanized politics, against the macroeconomic drivers ruling nowadays. That could be eased by more autonomy for regions and nations and respect for the right to self determination.
- The urge for real and strong international cooperation in order to effectively face the global challenges empowering regions will enable a grass root approach and easier implementation on a local level of measures for fighting against global environmental and social problems, which necessarily must be globally addressed. Actions must be coordinated through effective and democratic institutions at different inter-entity levels.
- At present the Regions have no decision making capacities within the EU institutions. This often results in states taking decisions on aspects of policy without a proper level of knowledge. We believe that regions must have their say in the construction and policy making of the EU instead of it being dictated exclusively by the member states. Therefore it is essential that regions have binding legislative capacities within the EU institutions.

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<sup>i</sup> Slovenia is the best example of this for over the last one hundred years: As a region of the Austro Hungarian Empire, after the First World War the west part of Slovenia was under the Italian State and the other part was in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, invaded during the Second World War, Republic in the Yugoslavia Socialist Federation, got independence in 1991 and since 2004 is full state member of the European Union.