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## **The Future starts now! 10 cornerstones of the Dialogue Between the Progressive Family and the Millennials Generation**

Amy McDonald, one of the iconic singers of the Millennial Generation, sang that *you don't know a thing about the youth of today, stating your opinion, making it ring in my head all day...* Would that indeed be the case?

For over a decade now, after each and every election an old and somewhat worn-out story is being repeated. It features disenchanted, depressed and disengaged young people, who have turned their back to the political system. They *ignore* political appeals, they *distance* themselves the campaign and they *fail* to appear at the ballot boxes. Their absence within the framework of institutionalised political conversation makes them a target of political prejudices. Paradoxically, the more they abstain and the less they express, the more vigorously they are targeted with speeches that stipulate who they are. From “*Generation X*” to “*Generation NEET*” – all the labels contain perhaps a grain, but only a grain of the truth. What is missing among serious journalistic diagnoses, robust sociological research papers and political speeches is the voice of the youth itself. And this is what FEPS together with partners wants to change – by launching a new initiative called “Millennials Generation Dialogue”.

The project was designed to serve a 3P rule – being positive, participatory and progressive.

- **It is to be “positive” because it is to change the terms on the current debate.** There has been enough of complaining, blaming and shaming of young people for the fact that they do not attend the polling stations or for the fact that they do not subscribe to the political organisations. The ambition of the “Millennials Dialogue” is not about resonating claims, but about asking what prompts resentment of the younger generation. The aim therefore is to listen, to learn and to change.
- **It is to be “participatory” because it is to give the floor to the representatives of the youth.** There has been enough of building stereotypes, alongside which the younger generation look homogenous in terms of appearance and individualistic, if not egoistic in terms of their attitudes. This is a grave mistake to think that one can see them, their dreams and their challenges as one uniformed cluster. The ambition of “Millennials Dialogue” is not about providing a “one model fits all manual”, but about presenting the detailed self-portrait of this age group in the richness of their diversity. The aim therefore is to ask the youth to express themselves, to extract what inspires them and to include their demands.
- **It is to be “progressive” because it is to support the social democratic family in acquiring a new connection with the younger generation.** There has been

enough of complaining that the youth does not make a link between the progressive initiatives, such as the Youth Guarantee and the political parties within the progressive family. It has been noted that to the contrary, the appeal of the centre left programme is not strong enough to compete with the one of the radical and protest parties that attract the younger voters these days. The ambition of the “Millennials Dialogue” is not about regretting the shift, but about enabling the younger generation to state what they expect social democracy’s mission to be about. The aim therefore is to frame the agenda jointly, to make a feasible plea and set the new criteria of the delivery by the centre left.

In that spirit until September 2015, there were: over **10 thousands young respondents** involved in the survey, which resulted in receiving of **almost half a million survey responses**. Following that, almost **6 thousands posts** were placed within the herewith newly created virtual community and already **10 countries-specific reports** were launched providing the summary of what has been learnt so far. The Millennials’ Dialogue has featured a number of events on both the sides of the Atlantic. The project has been enthusiastically welcome and recognised as an innovative one, attracting even more partners within the EU and beyond – which allowed it to cover the majority of the European States and indeed *go global*.

This rich material serves as an inspiration for this paper, which is drafted in order to sum up the initial findings alongside with identifying the queries that will guide the further debate. It is structured along **10 initial reflections** that emerge from the research, which are matched with subsequently formulated **10 core questions** for the progressives to answer. Together they are the cornerstones that are to serve as a blueprint for the country-specific summaries, helping to organise and focus the debate.

## **Millennials' Dialogue – 10 initial reflections**

- 1. Millennials are not interested in politics in its current format, however politically aware and would be ready to vote.**

Millennials generation should not be painted as *politically disengaged*. This group acquires and poses information regarding contemporary politics, its main actors and is expressing readiness to vote. Where they are different is in their approach is that generation they do not think that established politics is a vehicle to change the reality – they rather point at economy or digital evolution as the factors causing either progress or regress.

- 2. Millennials do not find inspiration in contemporary mainstream politics, however they are optimistic and happy with many things in their lives, and they are confident to seek changes.**

Millennials Generation should not be portrayed as *angry and disappointed*. This group finds itself overall content with their lives and perspectives, seeks and believes in a possibility of improvement– but most obviously does not think that the mainstream, traditional political formula that had served their parents accommodates their aspirations and hopes for a change.

- 3. Millennials do not see traditional partisan life as particularly appealing, however they are interested in different group activities.**

Millennials Generation should not be described as *apathetic*. They are in fact active in terms of defining their interests and consequently choosing their leisure activities. While they find culture and sports exciting, the politics they don't – as it also seem to fail to offer a really exciting and stimulating experience.

- 4. Millennials don't value politics as a profession, while they have clear conditions on what they would need to do to restore trust and gain their electoral support**

Millennials Generation does not appreciate politics as a professional occupation and doesn't find itself in the traditional forms of partisan life, but is ready to invest in it based on personal experience. They admit that they have a difficulty to trust the respective candidates and to believe that their vote will matter, translating into the policies that they would like to see executed. But at the same time, they are ready to open up and reconsider – if they are directly approached and this individual experience would convince them to the people asking for their support.

- 5. Millennials don't think that the traditional political parties represent them, but know what would need to be done to repair this broken link.**

Millennials Generation do not see politicians as those, who are preoccupied with their generational aspirations and would strive for a better future for them. To the contrary they identify unresolved tensions, alongside with the limitations that the contemporary politics is

incorporating and imposing. But at the same time, they hint that the most relevant for them to reconsider would be to know that the politicians take them seriously and that they are ready to provide them with life opportunities among which they could choose more freely.

**6. Millennials don't think politics is focused on their direct expectations, but have clearly defined priorities they would like to see taken care of.**

Millennials Generation does not see their priorities included in the political agenda, but has a clear view of what should make a part of it and what should common resources be directed to. In that sense they are very consistent in seeing health and happiness as a priority, for achieving which they expect the public spending to be directed to the health policy agenda, jobs creation, education, fighting poverty and establishing green economy.

**7. Millennials don't think politics currently delivers, but they have their own set of delivery criteria**

Millennials Generation do not think that contemporary politicians deliver in overall terms; however they are ready to set new specific criteria of delivery alongside their view what the programmatic priorities of the politicians should be. These fall into 3 categories: matters-related ones (here are i.e. the questions of healthcare or education), the intention related ones (here are i.e. readiness to listen and work for the younger generation's agenda) and legitimacy related ones (here are i.e. understanding of the democratic mandate they have been given and here through their sense of mission). What is important in the light of the survey findings is that in none of that retrenchment in terms of political horizons or specific policies resonated well.

**8. Millennials generally don't trust politicians, but nevertheless they are ready to fairly evaluate their qualities and competences.**

Millennials see trust as one of the key motivators to make them go vote – they do not see that as a virtue of any of the parties within the current political system. This does not prevent them from evaluating the parties however, which allows to see clear distinction how they perceive the parties from respectively different political segments. While the traditional parties are not denied their qualities in terms of professional experience, they are generally seen as self-centred. And that is the vulnerability from which radical, protest and populist parties benefit from.

**9. Millennials do not feel a connection with the contemporary partisan system, but they are ready to imagine themselves as initiators or as a part of a campaign**

Millennials feel that their priorities are 'lost in translation', but nevertheless still they do exhibit readiness to mobilise and join or launch a political action. They are very clear what ways they find efficient to communicate the message and rally support. As a generation living a digital era, they do consider internet an important medium – but that does not make them disregard neither traditional broadcasters (tv or radio) or the power of one-to-one meetings. That should be of a relief to the parties, which should herewith feel that the

assumed tensions between i.e. canvassing and Internet door knocking is simply not real.

**10. Millennials may not be keen on voting in the European elections, but they are a generation that wants to live an interrelated Europe and a peaceful world.**

Millennials Generation may not appear euro-enthusiastic in electorally behavioural sense, but remains convinced about the necessity of both international and European cooperation. In that sense they are very appreciative to the work that is being done by the state's representatives on the global and the Union's level, while expecting more however in terms of their inner policies that would foster their country's military capacity. That seems striking and would point towards an obvious feeling of the Millennials' insecurity regarding the feasibility of a promise of a global peaceful coexistence.

## Millennials' Dialogue – 10 core questions

1. **How to prove that progressives understand the approach of the Millennials, while responding to them with a feasible programme that will subordinate economy to a political rule and will make politics remain at service of the society?**
2. **How to create an innovative political project that would appeal to the young people idealistic belief that another world is possible, while making it encompass the answers to both the challenges that they face and the aspirations that they have?** Millennials can and should be seen as part of the solution to the paralysis that the traditional politics finds itself in.
3. **How to re-establish the link between politics, political culture and culture?** Millennials would engage in the partisan life that is attractive, while organisationally enabling creativity, diverse forms of self-expression and political socialisation.
4. **How to renew the movement so that it presents itself as a real, serious alternative and not a part of a cartel system of the mainstream political consensus?** Even more than a programme, the Millennials would like to be able to rely on the politicians – and hence see a leader that they could entrust their hopes with.
5. **How to construct an agenda that would show that social democrats know how to solve the inter-generational conflicts, while remaining a movement courageously seeking new opportunities to progress for all?** Millennials expect a narrative that would also incorporate a new progressive understanding of freedom, reclaiming it from: neo-liberals, from protest and radical parties, and from the political system's fringes and outskirts.
6. **How to create and execute a programme, which would show that the austerity is not unavoidable and the highly valued public policies remain at the core of the social democratic struggle?** Millennials have a clear set of priorities and put healthcare in a broad sense as number one, demanding at the same time life opportunities and choices alongside with the possibility to reconcile all of them (including jobs) with the family and social life.
7. **How to become (young) people's party again?** Millennials want the parties to take the criterion of legitimacy and representation seriously, striking a new balance between idealism (as referring to aspirations) and realism. The progressive parties and their governance should try to become as a source of reassurance, reason for optimism and hopefulness – which at this point Millennials are finding elsewhere.
8. **How to re-establish the social competence of the progressive parties?** Millennials see the professionalism of the parties, but require them to accomplish a certain 'return to the roots of activism', proving that they still listen and care. Parties need to explore the methods that will transform them towards more open organisations, enabled to enter into a direct exchange with diverse voters groups (here especially young ones).

9. **How to convert the campaigns into set of actions, that can mobilise equally effectively in the real (canvassing, meetings) as in the virtual (tv, radio, internet) worlds?** Millennials keep both in high regard, being a generation that value personal experience and modern technology at the same time. Successful strategy would require making political rallies closer to cultural, exciting and emotionally loaded experiences. As also it would require consistency in using all the media in a manner, which would make all broadcasts mutually reinforcing and multiplication-inducing.
  
10. **How to modernise its global and European agendas, so that they can present a tangible promise of a peaceful future of sustainably developing world?** Millennials are certain that the international and European cooperation are important, however a change of a narrative is essential to convince them that the efforts must continue to deepen it and advance, providing new guarantees and reaching new horizons.



## Millennials' Dialogue – Summary of the findings<sup>1</sup>

### **1. Millennials are not interested in politics in its current format, however politically aware and would be ready to vote.**

The Millennial Generation is referred to as a demographic group that is *politically disengaged*. Indeed, the collected data would suggest so, since the number of young people interested in politics does not cross over the threshold of one fifth. The lowest level is observed in Hungary (only 6% declared “very interested” in politics, versus 37% “Not that interested” and 36% “Not interested at all”). The statistics get even worse when the youngest strata is extracted – in the brackets 15 – 17 years of age only 7% of Polish declared interest in politics versus 0% in Italy. Similar results are shown in Germany, as also in Bulgaria. This prompts a conclusion that the situation is *bad* and will deteriorate even further.

The anxiety caused by this data is what instinctively makes politicians approach the younger generation with negative connotations, perceiving them as withdrawn, introvert and uninterested. And here is where the main misconception lies. First of all, “withdrawn” does not translate into unwillingness to vote – 80% of young Germans would vote should the election “take place tomorrow”, versus 70% of young Italians and 66% of young Polish. Hence they may have pulled out of the traditional politics and its frames, but it does not mean that they are not ready to speak up or that they would resign from their civic rights.

Secondly, “introvert” does mean that younger generation does not see the interconnectedness of the world they live in. To the contrary, they have very clearly formulated opinions in terms of what affects the future of their lives. Polish, Germans, Italians, Bulgarians and Hungarians – all 5 nationals point out in overwhelming majority (above 90%) that it is the economic situation (global and national) that influences and will continue influencing the quality of their lives. But it is only Hungarians that think that almost equally important are the decisions made by the politicians (81% shares that view). Hence it is perhaps not that much them, who are *introvert* – but it is politics that they perceive as either self-absorbed or unrelated to the factors shaping their future.

Thirdly, and finally “uninterested” does not translate into unawareness of what is happening in politics. The younger generation knows the top politicians and leading parties. The parliamentary ones score at the level of recognition of 90% and above, with the seated prime minister usually being known by almost all (91% in Hungary, 93% in Italy and Bulgaria respectively, 96% in Germany, 97% in Poland). Progressive parties tend to score in the middle of the scale in terms of recognition – with 57% Polish knowing SLD, 61% being familiar with SPD, 72% recognising Partito Democratico, 89% acknowledging MSZP and finally 95% being acquainted with BSP. Comparing these with the electoral turnouts and the votes casted on the respective parties, it is but evident that it is not lack of interest or insufficient information that drives the younger generation away from the polling stations.

**The conclusion arriving from these is that Millennials generation should not be painted as *politically disengaged*.** This group acquires and poses information regarding contemporary politics, its main actors and is expressing readiness to vote. Where they are different is in their approach is that generation they do not think that established politics is a vehicle to change the reality – they rather point at economy or digital evolution as the factors causing

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the data available on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2015 from: Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary, Italy and Poland.

either progress or regress.

**The question that remains for the debate among the progressive is how to prove that they understand the approach of the Millennials, while responding to that with programme and action plan that will subordinate economy to a political rule, which will remain at the service of theirs and the society overall.**

- 2. Millennials do not find inspiration in contemporary mainstream politics, however they are optimistic and happy with many things in their lives, and they are confident to seek changes.**

The Millennial Generation has been spoken broadly as the age group with a gloomy perspective for life. The subsequent editions of the *Eurobarometer* and survey by other institutes have coined the understanding that the current 30+ age group expects their and their children's future to be featuring worse standards of live than the ones their parents enjoyed.

This led to two conclusions on the side of the mainstream politicians. First of all, it was assumed that the youth is a group composed of people in despair and the approach vis-à-vis them should be therapeutically comforting. Hence the mainstream parties use the well-known slogans: "we will not let the current generation live on the costs of the future ones". On the right they referred to what the conservatives and liberals consider to be the "overspending of the robust welfare states", while on the left it has been used mostly in the context of debates focused on sustainability (of i.e. environment). Secondly, it was anticipated that the new generation should be addressed via reference to the problems many of them experience (such as unemployment, limited access to education and training) and not through a positive message that would frame an emotional bond based on understanding of their respective, diverse, generational ambitions. The two approaches have not proven successful. Not only the major challenges that the youth faces sadly remain unsolved, but also the trend of the shift of young voters towards more radical or even protest parties continues.

The "Millennials Dialogue" survey points in that sense towards a different, quite unorthodox direction. From within the data, it seems that the younger generation consider themselves as generally *happy*<sup>2</sup>. So claim 89% of young Germans, 88% of young Bulgarians, 87 % of young Polish, 75% of young Italians and 61% of the young Hungarians. It is true that the data does not allow to identify the socio-economic profile of respondents, who crossed the "generally happy" answer, what they understand under this term or for that matter if more or less feels that under the progressive government, however already in its fabric it suggests that the overall opinion may have been misguided in their understanding of what the young people feel and think. To that end, for example 76% Bulgarians are optimistic about the future, which matches with 66% of Hungarians. This puts at least a question mark in how far it can be proven that the decision of so many young voters to seek political agents outside of the traditional political spectre may not be the question of their anger with the personal life circumstances (as frequently suggested), but rather an indication of something else. Following the results quoted, the hypothesis that seems plausible at that stage would be that they believe that a change for better is possible and they reject the mainstream parties cartel<sup>3</sup> approach and TINA<sup>4</sup> philosophy.

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<sup>2</sup> The collected data does not allow to make a distinction between the young people of the different socio-economic profiles.

<sup>3</sup> See the theory of the cartel parties.

This premise can find supporting evidence also elsewhere. In none of the countries it turned out that young people would see ideologies, political parties or specific politicians as those actors, who would have the biggest influences on their lives. Young Polish and Italians enumerate: *parents, siblings, and friends*; while for young Germans it is *parents, friends and siblings*. The instinctive explanation in terms of the shift between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> position can be quite different family lives' models in between those countries. But generally speaking, while it is the parents – who inspire, influence and indicate the choices – the younger generation itself admits to think that themselves they are less connected with politics than their parents or grandparents. So thinks 51% of Polish, 56% of Germans, 60% of Italians and Hungarians respectively, and 66% of Bulgarians. Taking those two outcomes together – strong interrelation with parents on one hand, and distancing themselves from their political culture on the other, - would mean that it is not lack of political and civic education that makes young withdraw from politics. It would rather stipulate that this is the lack of a project that they would find personally attracting, inspiring and worth investing in.

**The conclusion arriving from these is that Millennials Generation should not be painted as angry and disappointed.** This group finds itself overall content with their lives and perspectives, seeks and believes in a possibility of improvement– but most obviously does not think that the mainstream, traditional political formula that had served their parents accommodates their aspirations and hopes for a change.

**The question that remains for the debate among the progressive is how to create an innovative political project that would appeal to the young people idealistic belief *that another world is possible*, while making it encompass the answers to both the challenges that they face and the aspirations that they have. Millennials can and should be seen as part of the solution to the paralysis that the traditional politics finds itself in.**

### **3. Millennials do not see traditional partisan life as particularly appealing, however they are interested in different group activities.**

The Millennial Generation is often considered as *apathetic*. It is the quality assigned to them in the context of the *democratic malaise* that describes the contemporary societal behavioural patterns. They spread in between the political aspects (such as voting attitudes, where the lowering turnout is perhaps the most commonly mentioned feature) and the participation in the different communities (from interest groups to civil society organisations). In that sense young people are perceived as de-motivated, individualistic and introvert.

This picture is neither fair, nor true. The data collected show in fact to the contrary. First and foremost, the younger generation is very keen on enjoying broadly understood culture<sup>5</sup>. All the respondents have given the top scores to film and music - with 94% of Italian and Polish marking movies as their main interest. Against prejudices that would perhaps place them in front of television at home, above three quarters declares fondness of cinema (with 89% Italians, 87% of Polish, 82% of Bulgarians, 81% of Germans and 72% of Hungarians). Further on the list are: theatre (scoring in between 44% in terms of interest by young Hungarians

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<sup>4</sup> Infamous: *There Is No Alternative* – which was used initially by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher to explain political choices of the conservative government and recently has been adopted by the mainstream parties in Europe to justify the unpopular austerity policies.

<sup>5</sup> The data available do not distinguish in between the different educational or socio-economic profiles of the respective respondents.

and 60% by young Bulgarians) and festivals. Still quite high on the lists are also sports – both in terms of taking part (between 74% by Bulgarians and Italians, to 68% and 65% by respectively Germans and Hungarians) and in terms of watching (74% of Italians top these scores versus 49% of Bulgarians on the other side of the scale). These contrast with the low popularity of politics among the interests: 29% of Hungarian, 49% of Bulgarians and Polish, 56% of Italians and 57% of Germans.

These findings would stipulate that in fact *culture* and *political culture* have drifted apart in the perception of the younger generation. This does not touch only narrowly upon the ideological ethos and the way of proceeding, but rather points out that the evolution of the world of politics made it disconnected from separately developing world of arts. One could say that with that *the drums that would mark the beat of the different movements hearts got lost*, depriving the contemporaries from a possibility to see the political organisations as also cultural communities. This presents itself as a great challenge especially for the progressives, whose political family grew upon workers' mobilisation and frequently also revolutionary arts, literature and music.

Equally, there is a missing connection between the world of politics and the world of sports. While in the disciplines that are popular to watch, such as football, a number of positive campaigns have been observed, they are neither linked not even referred to by the politicians. A prominent example of it is the FIFA anti-racism campaign, which engaged top players and has been broadcasted worldwide – but to the contrary, did not resonate, in the political discourse.

To that end, it is important to mention that the young generation is quite taken also by the technological evolution and the developments that it brings along. They declare a very high interest in new technology<sup>6</sup> (91% of Italians, 88% of Bulgarians, 82% of Polish, 75% of Germans and Hungarians) and participation in the social media (86% of Bulgarians, 84% of Italians, 83% of Polish, 79% of Germans and 74% of Hungarians). That altogether would signify that on the top of interests and activities within the “real” world, they also enjoy interacting within the virtual one. While their interests here are quite clear and confirmed also by their behavioural attitudes regarding participation in the virtual community created within the survey, it is only a very few mainstream parties that can be proud of having mastered activities in both. To the contrary, much more effective here were the ad-hoc, new movements – which were able to pick the young people's interest here.

All these outcomes contrast with the interests that Millennials declare to have for traditional politics, which scores in the bottom 3 of the 15 enumerated categories. The question therefore would be why. The hypothesis is that while the culture, sports and social media offer a stimulating experience, allow to belong to a group of viewers and make one effectively a part of a community of people having an opinion on a respective matter, the politics fails to do so. It does not appear to be an adventure thanks to which ones fulfils a sense of belonging, being among like-minded and effectively grasp an opportunity to challenge to explore (or be provoked to explore) new things.

**The conclusion arriving from these is that Millennials generation should not be painted as *apathetic*.** They are in fact active in terms of defining their interests and consequently choosing their leisure activities. While they find culture and sports exciting, the politics they don't – as it also seem to fail to offer a really exciting and stimulating experience.

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<sup>6</sup> The data available are collected without prejudice regarding the actual accessibility of internet that the young people surveyed have at their disposal.

The question that remains for the debate among the progressive is how to re-establish the link between politics, political culture and culture. It should not be backward looking, trying to restore the cultural legacy of the previous generations in the movement – but it should focus on how to organise the partisan life so that it is attractive, while enabling creativity, diverse forms of self expression and political socialisation. The supplementary issue is how to ensure that it is done so both in real and virtual social spheres.

#### **4. Millennials don't value politics as a profession, while they have clear conditions on what they would need to do to restore trust and gain their electoral support**

The evolution of politics brought along a number of phenomena, among them *mediatisation* and *professionalization*. Indeed, nowadays being a politician is often seen as a *having* a profession, especially that as an occupation it takes more than a full-time and offers financial gratification. The contemporary political careers also require that in order to become a “front-bencher” one needs to devote him or herself to that path fully and from the earliest years. In terms of skills it would be rather *school of political life* that they graduate from, having often no other professional experience than *being* and serving in a party.

As it turns out it is not seen as a dream job by the Millennials. Young Italians would prefer to become business founders or owners, sportsman (women) or research scientists – enumerating 7 other desirable professions ahead of becoming a politician. Young Polish, who however place “politician” as number 10 in ranking of jobs they would choose, indicate similar order. The same place is given by young Germans, who in the trio of top jobs see sportsman (woman) as absolute first. Becoming a business owner (founder) is also the most exciting prospect for young Hungarians (so declared 34%) and Bulgarians (49%), while both these casted only 4% of votes on a “politician”. Such an attitude potentially indicates that the younger generation wants to take their faith in their own hands and values ensuring one's own prosperity directly. Hence they show some entrepreneurial tendencies. At the same time, they do not find professional politics neither too attractive nor too desirable to exercise – and that could in some ways explain why the parties don't see young members engaging.

The reluctance in taking part in the traditional partisan life, which popularly features meetings, is further indicated by numbers. Only 10% of young Italians take part in political meetings, 8% of young Germans, 7% of young Polish and young Bulgarians, while only 3% of young Hungarians. Better scores are noted for other, alternative ways of participating in politics – with 19% of young Bulgarians taking part in protest and demonstrations, 14% of Italians, 11% of Germans, 9% of Polish and 5% of Hungarians.

This is a very interesting scoreboard for democracy – as against the claims it is also not the protest politics *sensu largo* that attracts this generation the most. As pointed out already in point 1, it is still by far the most natural way for the Millennials to explain their views – however before actually going and casting their ballots, they have some conditions that they expect politicians to fulfil.

The young Polish, German and Italian state straightforward that they would definitely go

voting, should they have a chance to trust politicians more and should they were convinced that their votes would matter. Respectively they admit that they abstain usually because they do not have confidence neither in candidates nor in political parties. Young Italians think that this is because they do not see any of the parties particularly representing their views, while the Polish and Germans claim that this is because they think “all parties are the same”. The herewith presumed political mainstream created by the formerly left or right political parties around the centre is the factor that they describe as repulsive. Interestingly so, while they are critical about lack of bold ideological differences, they do not justify their voting abstention by *disliking of available political choices*. It is noteworthy, as it indicates that against the prejudice – currently inactive young voters are not the future supporters of anti-systemic movements by default.

For all the young people taking part in election appears to be an extremely personal issue. What motivates them to vote is usually the knowledge about the candidates. For majority the decisive is what they think about a leader – it is relevant for 84% of Italians, 83% of Germans, 87% of Polish, 84% of Hungarians and 83% of Bulgarians (here under the label of “perspective presidents”). The other prominent aspects are their knowledge and opinion about the local candidates, and subsequently the impressions they have has hearing the interviews or watching tv show with the candidates. Much less important are reading manifestoes, meeting campaigners, receiving campaign materials (both in reality and the virtual ones), as also the views of the close friends of the family members.

**The conclusion arriving from these is that Millennials generation does not appreciate politics as a professional occupation and doesn't find itself in the traditional forms of partisan life, but is ready to invest in it based on personal experience.** They admit that they have a difficulty to trust the respective candidates and to believe that their vote will matter, translating into the policies that they would like to see executed. But at the same time, they are ready to open up and reconsider – if they are directly approached and this individual experience would convince them to the people asking for their support.

**The question that remains for the debate among the progressive is how to renew the movement so that it presents itself as a real, serious alternative and not a part of a cartel system of the mainstream political consensus. Even more than a programme, the Millennials would like to be able to rely on the politicians – and hence see a leader that they could entrust their hopes with. This should make the parties seriously consider the ways they elect their presidents and select their candidates.**

##### **5. Millennials don't think that the traditional political parties represent them, but know what would need to be done to repair this broken link.**

The contemporary democratic political systems are based on the principles of representation and legitimacy. That defines the relation between citizen – voter and the political parties – the elected politicians. The later ones are expected to aggregate, consolidate and advocate for the ideas of the electorate, following the programmatic platform for which that they have received the support in the elections. In that sense, the political parties are agents of change bound to a mandate offered them through the casted votes.

There is handful of studies showing that the classical understanding of the nature of these

connections between the traditional parties and the citizens is no longer applicable. Diverse societal processes (here especially fragmentation, polarisation and individualisation) alongside with the evolution of the political systems themselves (the emergence of the catch-all parties, the blending of the opposing ideologies into a grand coalition operating as a cartel system etc.) mean that it is impossible to talk, for instance, about “class votes” or “core electorates”. To the contrary, it would seem that every election is a plebiscite during which competition among the parties is much more open than before. This is shown by the volatility of the electoral support, which is explained by the fact that nowadays people tend to vote generally identifying themselves rather with a specific issue than with an ideology. This trend resonates also among the Millennials. While as shown before they see personal experience with politics as the most influential factor in terms of *if* to vote, they decide *whom* to vote following their passion for one or another issue. It is worth noting that their choice is formulated individually and is not subjected to persuasion of family members or peers (even if, as previous sections indicated, it is parents, whom they identify as having the largest influence on their lives<sup>7</sup>).

The picture is too complex to offer a singular answer explaining all the electoral choices of the Millennials. The survey however enables to identify the core issues that they consider repulsive and consequently discouraging from making them offer their electoral support. The first among them is the fact that the younger generation believes that their views are being largely ignored. 84% of young Bulgarian thinks so (versus 16%, who has contradictory opinion); 81% young Italians state so (while 24% believe the opposite to be the case); 77% of young Polish (versus 22% of those who are confident that their views matter); 65% of young Hungarians (versus 13%, who suppose otherwise); 64% of young Germans (versus 19%, who think the opposite). These numbers prove that the majority of the younger generation feel generally not included, not taken seriously or not even considered - and the percentage of them, who would contradict it never reaches a critical level of one quarter of the generation representatives.

Secondly, there seems to be a tension between the Millennials conviction that they should be listened to and here through also represented in comparison on how they feel the older people’s agenda is taken care of<sup>8</sup>. 58% of young Italians, 56% of young Germans, 52% of young Hungarians, 54% of young Bulgarians and 51% of young Polish think that politicians are “more concerned” with the older people than with them (versus respectively: 21% of young Italians, 21% of young Polish, 16% of young Germans, 10% of young Hungarians and 15% of young Bulgarians, who think otherwise). This assessment would, at least partially explain, why the traditional parties are ageing – but beyond that it points to another interesting observation. It would seem that in overall terms the politics of today does not provide a tangible answer on what *solidarity between generations* effectively means. That reaffirms the situation, when worried about sustainability of the system; different groups potentially turn against one another – simply naturally competing for attention and resources. This hypothesis may be loaded with more threat than expected – especially that it could mean that the older people voting the traditional parties versus the younger people seeking alternatives elsewhere (even if those are only seasonal groupings) can be in fact a struggle between the old and the new partisan order.

Thirdly, the younger generation feels that the politics of today is rather about limiting them than about offering them better prospects for the future. 65% of young Hungarians state that “most politicians want to control and restrict young people”, which is agreed by 63% of

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<sup>7</sup> See section 2 of this paper

<sup>8</sup> The data does not allow defining what is being considered as “younger” or “older” people’s concerns.

young Bulgarians, 57% of young Germans and young Italians respectively and 56% of young Polish. These numbers are striking especially in comparison with the numbers showing how many Millennials believe that *most politicians want the best possible future for young people*. It is only 12% of Hungarians, 16% of young Germans, 17% of young Bulgarians, 22% of young Polish 25% of young Italians. This is providing yet another lesson. If social sciences are correct in their mainstream diagnosis, the Millennials are the generation that abides by the post-post modernist values – where freedom (liberty) scores among the highest appreciated principles. It is paired with equality (understood as gender equality and of sexual orientation specifically) that is scoring: 85% of support by young Germans, 78% of support by young Italians and Polish. The fact that they consider politics narrowing and not broadening its options is therefore a serious issue, as that shows that they do not see the current system fitting with the expectations they have towards how they should be framing and leading their lives. To that end, they do not see the interest of theirs (best future) and the ambitions of the politicians (whom they associated with restrictions) converge.

**The conclusion arriving from these is that Millennials generation do not see politicians as those, who are preoccupied with their generational aspirations and would strive for a better future for them.** To the contrary they identify unresolved tensions, alongside with the limitations that the contemporary politics is incorporating and imposing. But at the same time, they hint that the most relevant for them to reconsider would be to know that the politicians take them seriously and that they are ready to provide them with life opportunities among which they could choose more freely.

**The question that remains for the debate among the progressive is how to construct an agenda that would show that social democrats know how to solve the inter-generational conflicts, while remaining a movement courageously seeking new opportunities to progress for all. The overall narrative should also incorporate a new understanding of freedom – of choice, of options, of access – so that it is being reclaimed from: neo-liberals, from protest and radical parties, and from the political system’s fringes and outskirts.**

#### **6. Millennials don’t think politics is focused on their direct expectations, but have clearly defined priorities they would like to see taken care of.**

Every generation grows up with its’ very own dream and seeks to fulfil it, while imposing an essential transformation. This is also why it is being claimed that every time needs its own answers, this is how the diverse historical periods distinguish from one another, and this is how a continues development and here through also progress is being assured. The changes can come in an evolutionary manner; however they can induce more abrupt changes – being a catalyst of the new movements and new political doctrines to emerge. For the social democratic movement such moments were of course the very beginning of industrial revolution, when they came out as the movement that demanded that social dimension of it is regulated, or for that matter the 1960s, when it embraced the social demands for freedom and peace as impulses to renew its own agenda.

Since the centre-left movement succeed that in the past, the troublesome query remain how come it only partially managed to do so in the 1990s (when the phenomena of globalisation emerged and the movement divided around the modernisation ways<sup>9</sup>) and did not succeed in the midst of the financial crisis of 2008. The popular belief, even if not truly based on any historical evidence, was that social democracy would benefit from the crash

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<sup>9</sup> Reference here is to the so called ‘Third Way’

politically – as the predicament would show the deficiency of the neo-liberal model and would make the voters turn back the electoral pendulum towards the centre left. As the numerous analyses show that did not happen, which makes many wonder why in the aftermath – with some exceptions – the centre-left is in the best case scenario polling around one quarter or one third of the available votes only. That underpinned a number of ‘grand coalitions’ within which social democrats frequently gave into the policies designed to “get control over robust spending”. The problem was that it led to infamous “austerity”, which translated in many countries into the cuts of the welfare state. Vastly unpopular at first, they gradually turned to be seen as the “bitter medicine to swallow”. The subsequent elections seem to prove that this become a new understanding, which then is rather favourable for the centre-right to glow upon<sup>10</sup>.

While these are the political facts, they should further be seen in the context of still declining active engagement of the Millennials generation in this very same political system (see sections 1 and 2 of this paper). This would mean that the ‘new consensus’ – if one can take a risk of calling it so – does not reflect what their aspirations effectively are. That is especially in terms of the lives choices that they would like to lead.

The data collected through the survey support this hypothesis in fact. While asked to rank the issues accordingly to their importance, Millennials provide a following list of priorities. *Being in a good health* is the number one for young Germans, Italians, Polish and Bulgarians. It comes second for the young Hungarians, who indicate that *being happy*<sup>11</sup> is the most relevant. That is the number two for the four others. The number 3 is with no exceptions for *having leisure time*, while numbers 4 and 5 vary. For young Italians it is *spending time with family* and *freedom of speech*. For young Bulgarians and Hungarians *being free to say what I want* also comes as number 4 and 5 respectively, however *making money* attracts Hungarian more. That view is also shared by Polish, who place is as their number 4, followed by *Being successful*<sup>12</sup>. The young Germans on the other hand value *having voice heard* and spending time with friends.

These findings allow two observations. The Millennials are the generation that is concerned about their well-being – hence the notions of happiness, success and good health. While the later one ranks as the first one, regardless of the country in which the survey was conducted, it means that they would seek much to have ways and choices in order to conduct a healthy life style. It can of course politically translate into numerous dimensions – from the health environment and food, through access to sports (which they indicate they are interested in – see section 1), to the public policies preventing illnesses and supporting in case of sickness.

The second observation is that the Millennials value the living conditions more than other aspects of their lives. This means that what they would expect most likely is a possibility to reconcile all the other issues (including here work) with the time and ways they wish to pursue to devote themselves to the relations with family and friends. As such it contradicts the earlier already busted myths about their individualistic attitudes. Here however a distinction needs to be made – while they want to spend more time among those closest to them, any societal or communitarian aspects of life come only after in the list of priorities. That is of a great consideration, especially for the progressives, who (due to own origins and traditions) think about mobilisation and organising alongside the traditional line of the

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<sup>10</sup> See the diverse analyses 2015 elections in: the UK or Portugal.

<sup>11</sup> The data collected do not allow exploring what “being happy” means in particular.

<sup>12</sup> As in case of “being happy”, also the term “being successful” remains undetermined.

workers' community.

With the clear set of priorities, it does not astonish therefore that the Millennials have a clear view on what should be the main areas of public spending. The first one is *healthcare*, which polls at the levels of: 96% of young Bulgarians, 92% of young Polish, 91% among young Hungarians (equally high as job creation), 90% of young Polish, 87% of young Germans (comes second after education that polls at the level of 90%). It is seconded by *education* (95% of young Bulgarians, as mentioned 90% of young Germans, 89% of young Hungarians and Polish, 88% of young Italians). As the other one the Millennials name job creation with 94% of Bulgarians, 91% of Hungarians – for whom it is the top one, 90% of Polish and 88% of Italians. Interestingly here, it comes only as 5<sup>th</sup> priority for the young Germans scoring at 77% of Germans – which can be eventually explained by the relatively prosperous economic situation of their country especially in comparison to the others. The further places up to number five are filled in with: *fighting poverty* and attending *environmental, food and rural affairs* (for Hungarians and Bulgarians), *fighting poverty* and *investing in business, innovation and skills* (for Italians), *attending to environmental, food and rural affairs* and to *energy policies* (for young Germans); and finally *fighting poverty* and *attending energy* issues (by young Polish).

**The conclusion arriving from these is that Millennials generation does not see their priorities included in the political agenda, but has a clear view of what should make a part of it and what should common resources be directed to.** In that sense they are very consistent in seeing health and happiness as a priority, for achieving which they expect the public spending to be directed to the health policy agenda, jobs creation, education, fighting poverty and establishing green economy.

**The question that remains for the debate among the progressive is how to create and execute a programme, which would show that the austerity is not unavoidable and the highly valued public policies remain at the core of the social democratic struggle. At the same time, it is clear that with the review of priorities and putting healthcare in a broad sense (from life choices to prevention of sicknesses and healthcare system), it is also essential to attend the demand of the Millennials to offer life opportunities and choices alongside with the possibility to reconcile all of them (including jobs) with the family and social life that they find exceedingly relevant.**

## **7. Millennials don't think politics currently delivers, but they have their own set of delivery criteria**

With already mentioned professionalization and mediatization of politics (see section 4), the criteria of evaluation of political actions have altered. Since it became a "*job*", it started being assessed alongside the question in how far "*it is being well done*" and hence in how far persons exercising it have effectively *delivered*. In that sense, a vote became a good that a voter can 'trade' offering support, while in exchange expecting that the politicians will keep up to their initial promise and execute the programmatic plea, which they had made during the campaign.

The problem with these evaluation criteria is that it is hard to measure in how far parties and their representatives deliver. Especially because of the votes' spread and very infrequent landslide victories, they 'have to' repeatedly enter peculiar coalitions (from so

called 'grand' to multi-partisan), within which any step forward is an effect of a multi-pier consensus and political trading. To that end, the infamous TINA (see footnote 3) seems to be additionally disempowering them by narrowing the scope of tangible actions and certainly to a certain extent of boldness in terms of their political imagination. The consequent general perception that politicians nowadays '*can't do much*', which feeling sadly they themselves sustain while talking about unavoidability of processes such as globalisation. This means that while they lower the expectations against the socially conceptualised delivery criteria, the gap creates a space for resentment. This unsurprisingly occurs also among the Millennials.

While the previous section showed that the younger generation is very clear in terms of spelling out their own ambitions and priorities, the survey also allows stating that the young people are very decisive in terms of what they would like the politicians to do. Having a clear view on that, they also seem to think that in majority of cases the politicians fail to deliver.

Since the issue of health was named as the first priority for younger generation – both in terms of the state they want to enjoy and what should be the first allocation of the public spending – it is worth to look at how it plays on the *deliverables* scale so far. For young Italians, 89% of the respondents believe that it should be the priority for the politicians to work on – while only 60% believe that they do. Germans are an exception, as 89% indicates that politicians *should work on improving and maintaining good medical care*, when 95% trusts that this is the case. For Poland the gap is 89% support *that they should* with 42% saying *they do*; while Hungary is 93% versus 26%; and for Bulgaria it is 95% versus 25%. This shows the disparity along the line – with the largest being the countries that have most recently seen the liberalisation of the services and the retrenchment of the public health care systems. As to check the hypothesis, it seems to be confirmed by the polling in the field of education: in Italy it is 90% versus 57%, in Germany 90% versus 96%, Poland 89% versus 52%, Bulgaria 95% versus 30%, and finally Hungary with 92% versus 30%. It could further be backed by the numbers retrieved while asking about: investing in technology, ensuring well being of elderly (even if the other questions stipulated tensions in terms of intergenerational conflict – see section 5).

Another cluster of questions regarding the delivery criterion concerns the issues of more personal, perhaps philosophical nature. While the Millennials stated that they would like to see politicians visibly care for them and explicitly seek together with them the new openings through creating opportunities, it would seem that within this dimension they are even harder disappointed. In terms of working *to ensure equal opportunities for all*, 93% of young Italians believe that this should be the top priority, while 60% only thinks that politicians are delivering in this dimension. In Poland it is 90% versus 55%, in Bulgaria 88% versus 31%<sup>13</sup>, and in Hungary 81% versus 39%. Again Germany stands out, where the numbers are 93% to 95%, which perhaps hints to an explanation that the socio-economic policies are very determined by the state of economy and where there is a regression; the gap consequently broadens between objective and the delivery.

As much as their aspirations regarding equal opportunities are disappointed, similar dissonance is visible between the expectations regarding *ensuring best possible future for young people* and *putting people of the country first*. The first statement shall be seen as "how far politicians show the intention to take responsibility for the course of lives of respective others", while the second can be translated into "in how much they feel bond to

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<sup>13</sup> Here the questionnaire was more specific asking about "*ensuring equality of opportunities for all, regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation and ethnicity*"

the legitimacy principle<sup>14</sup>. These two are quite essential delivery criteria in the larger context of the diagnosis of the state of the representative democracy (see section 5).

In terms of Millennials, unsurprisingly, the gap between the expectation towards politicians to *ensure best possible future for them* and *in how far they do* is vast. For Italy the discrepancy is between 91% and 50%, for Poland it is 91% to 45%, for Hungary 92% to 27%, and for Bulgaria 94% to 24%. This is most striking, as obviously young people are convinced that politicians are not doing enough and hence not delivering on the objective. While this is to be contrasted with what was said about their general optimism and *feeling happy* (see section 2), it remains at odds. That is, unless to assume that the Millennials find the sources of their confidence and hope outside of the traditional politics. To that end, the numbers pulled out from Germany, which again stands out with 92% saying that the politicians should carry this specific work versus 97% believing that they do. This is most of all alarm bells for social democrats, who in the last decade have rather been experiencing tough times and hence were not the once to benefit from being seen as a reason for this confidence at all.

Finally, asked in how far politicians put people first, Millennials (again with exception of Germany, but here the margin is narrow 74% to 73%) show discontent. In Poland, 89% of young voters believe that politicians should put “People of Poland” first and only 56% thinks that they do. In Italy the gap stretches between 85% and 57%, in Hungary 84% to 38%, and in Bulgaria between 93% and 23% .

**The conclusion arriving from these is that Millennials generation do not think that contemporary politicians deliver in overall terms; however they are ready to set new specific criteria of delivery alongside their view what the programmatic priorities of the politicians should be.** These fall into 3 categories: matters-related ones (here are i.e. the questions of healthcare or education), the intention related ones (here are i.e. readiness to listen and work for the younger generation’s agenda) and legitimacy related ones (here are i.e. understanding of the democratic mandate they have been given and here through their sense of mission). What is important in the light of the survey findings is that in none of that retrenchment in terms of political horizons or specific policies resonated well.

**The question that remains for the debate among the progressive is how to become (young) people’s party again. The query is how to frame the list of priorities, so that they correspond with the ambitions of the new generation and also show that while asking for their support, the centre left takes seriously a criterion of legitimacy and representation. In that sense, they need to strike a new balance between idealism (as referring to aspirations) and realism. What is essential for the new narrative is to restore the link on the bases of which the young voters would see the progressive parties and their governance as a source of reassurance, reason for optimism and hopefulness – which at this point they are finding elsewhere.**

## **8. Millennials generally don’t trust politicians, but nevertheless they are ready to fairly evaluate their qualities and competences.**

The lack of trust in politicians and the doubt that they would deliver on their promises seem to remain one of the main factors discouraging Millennials from taking part in the

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<sup>14</sup> The question is interpreted alongside the line of the 2009 PES slogan “Putting People First” – which resonated typical for social democrats understanding of “first of all: serve the citizens”. It would be possible to argue that some of the respondents thought of the “national interests” as well, but the transposition into legitimacy principles allows here avoiding mistakes in the interpretation. It places the statement in democratic/state terms without detailed consideration of that notion.

institutional forms of political life such as voting (see sections 4 and 7). But this does not make them prejudicial in their approach and hence they show readiness to go beyond the statement *all political parties are the same* (see section 4 again) and distinguish in terms of what qualities and core competences a respective party in question possess in their opinion. This is a relevant piece of information. Although the social psychology and based on that political science analyses suggest that in politics *once lost competence is the one lost forever* – in case of this young generation it would seem not to be entirely true. And that would be a hint that there is eventually yet another possible opening in terms of constructing a connection.

To that end, the collected data show another thing. The Millennials are very decisive about pointing out which qualities they consider important for both the political parties and the political leaders. For the young Germans the most important are: *trustworthiness* (92%), *honesty* (92%), *intelligence* (91%), *a stance against corruption* (91%), *being good (capable) in crisis (management)* (90%), *ability to be firm* (89%). For young Italians the top ones are similar – even if order alters: *honesty* (90%), *intelligence* (89%), *a stance against corruption* (89%), *ability to listen to others* (89%), *trustworthiness* (89%) and *being 'good in crisis'* (88%). Furthermore, for the young Polish, the main qualities the political parties should embody are: *intelligence* (94%), *honesty* (94%), *being good in crisis* (93%), *trustworthiness* (93%), *ability to listen to others* (90%), and *a stance against corruption* (93%). What these numbers show predominantly is that they expect the parties to be smart, clear and consequent in their choices, alongside with showing concern for the others (voters) and remaining ethically responsible. In nutshell, these are the qualities that are quite naturally expected from those, whom one wants to entrust the power to determine alternatives, ensure opportunities and manage public resources.

While that doesn't astonish – what is of a great concern is that these expectations are clearly not matched by the qualities that the parties manifest in the eyes of young people. In overall terms, the highest scores reached by the parties in terms of in how far they embody the virtues are on the level of a quarter. In General, young Germans tend to be more positive than the others and here there are also certain exceptions to the statement above. A half of them perceives the main parties are "intelligent" (CDU on the level of 52%, SPD on 51%), as also they are more confident about the parties' ability to handle the crisis and to be firm (CDU is granted 48% and 45% respectively, while SPD polls on the levels of 40% and 42%). Germany is also the only country out of the sample, where social democrats are scoring better in at least some of the qualities attributed than the Christian-democrats are. These are trustworthiness (39%), honesty (43%) and stance against corruption (39%). The gap is not too vast, but worth noting – as this is exceptional indeed, comparing with Poland, Italy, Bulgaria or Hungary, where social democrats seem to perform worse than their traditional opponents alongside the scale. This tendency is especially noticeable in Bulgaria, where progressives are receiving only half of the praise that their competitors on the right do in such matters as: ability to be firm or to think (react) quickly.

Among the other noteworthy, country-specific findings, is a good performance of the conservative-liberal governing Civic Platform in Poland (credited relatively high for their intelligence, as also among the other categories – for greatest political experience among the parties, for ability to perform well on TV and even for "good looks"). Their numbers stand out in most of the categories and they are most of all seen as professional partisan machinery. Furthermore, in case of Hungary the more mainstream parties (both on the left and right) are perceived as less honest and lesser able to take a standpoint against corruption. These are rather attributed as qualities manifested by the radical or populist

parties.

Specifically, in terms of actively forging a connection, while *understanding young people* is an important evaluation criteria for the Millennials (94% of young Bulgarians<sup>15</sup>, 91% of young Polish, 89% of young Hungarians, 88% of young Italians, 87% of young Germans think so), *traditional* political parties tend to score between the lowest being 17% (Italy, Hungary Bulgaria – score noted by Forza Italia, MSZP and BSP respectively) and 37% - 36% (noted by Bulgarian GERB and German SPD). The disparity about the expectation and the actual state is therefore quite striking. Similarly, the same *traditional* parties score rather low in terms of other *social competences* – already mentioned *ability to listen to the others* and *caring nature*. In that sense they appear as very self-centred and hence also locked within their own boundaries.

What makes the last observation very serious in terms of identifying their true vulnerability is the fact that on the other hand the radical, populist and protest movements are filling in that gap. In Germany the Pirate Party<sup>16</sup> scores top in terms of *understanding young people* with 42%<sup>17</sup>, in Hungary Jobbik enjoys 48%, in Italy 5 Star Movement 41%, in Poland that is the Congress of New Right with 32%. In terms of *listening to the others* – with Germany being an exception here<sup>18</sup> - the tendency is confirmed with Jobbik being given 39% in the category, with 36% going to 5 Star Movement, 27% to both the Bulgarian Patriotic Front and Alternative for Bulgarian Revival<sup>19</sup>, and 25% assigned to the Polish Congress of the New Right. To complete the picture, in terms of *caring nature*, while none of the parties really stand out in Poland<sup>20</sup>, while in Italy it is attributed to 5 Star Movement with 36%, in Hungary to Jobbik with 32% and in Bulgaria splits between GERB (26%) and The reformist block (21%).

**The conclusion arriving from these is that while the Millennials see trust as one of the key motivators to make them go vote – they do not see that as a virtue of any of the parties within the current political system.** This does not prevent them from evaluating the parties however, which allows to see clear distinction how they perceive the parties from respectively different political segments. While the traditional parties are not denied their qualities in terms of professional experience, they are generally seen as self-centred. And that is the vulnerability from which radical, protest and populist parties benefit from.

**The question that remains for the debate among the progressive is how to re-establish their *social competence*. While their professionalism is not denied, perhaps a certain ‘return to the roots of activism’ would be desirable. This would require exploring methods through which parties (and their representatives) would become more open, more interested in direct exchange with diverse voters groups (here especially young ones) and would proof that they both *listen* and *care*.**

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<sup>15</sup> There is a difference between the available data: for Germany, Italy, Poland they present qualities for the political parties, while in case of Bulgaria and Hungary the question asked was rather “important qualities for an elected politicians” – making that personal and not a collective attribute.

<sup>16</sup> The period in which the survey was conducted the Pirate Party was in a different political position than the one they are in now.

<sup>17</sup> The Greens are a bit higher with 43%.

<sup>18</sup> SPD scores here the highest with 36%

<sup>19</sup> Governing GERB is the only one scoring higher with 34%

<sup>20</sup> In Germany it is assigned to Greens with 35%

## 9. Millennials do not feel a connection with the contemporary partisan system, but they are ready to imagine themselves as initiators or as a part of a campaign

While the mediatisation of politics (see section 4) has been progressing, the political performance started being measured alongside the line of communication strategy. The evaluation criteria that emerged herewith were, amongst others, visibility and effectiveness in embedding a core, coherent message in perception of a broad audience. That was therefore soon matched with the assumed expectations towards respective candidates – in terms of their ability to *come across well on tv and radio* and herewith also appearance (so called *good look*) and rhetoric skills (including sense of humour). These rules were well comprehended by the traditional parties, who found it as challenging as also doable to cope with the technological evolution that brought popularisation of tv. That is especially that in parallel with the development of the broadcast and multiplication of the stations, the legal framework was being put in place to ensure that they abide by the principles of pluralism, freedom of speech and democracy.

The further progress meant also that it became much easier to print and colportage materials, which was yet another impulse for development of the methods used within political marketing. Production of leaflets, posters and banners – which has been one of the oldest communication channels – became easier in terms of realisation, cheaper in terms of execution and could even be outsourced to external companies regarding distribution.

Where the story became more complicated, was the moment in which the digitalisation got into speed. Internet became available to all, becoming a source of popularisation of knowledge (including about political matters) and of information spread. Social media, which followed, enabled each and everyone to communicate on the scale so far unimaginable – forging in some ways a parallel universe of virtual reality. While the ‘rules of the game’ have not been invented or framed in legal ways yet, the political campaigning found itself in a peril. There have been suddenly many more opportunities, while there have been also certain uncertainty, lack of patterns and perhaps even skills in how to approach it. Additionally, within organisational debates a tension arrived between which methods to focus on: personal canvassing or internet mobilising?

This Millennials see the *ability to keep up with the latest technologies* as one of the relevant qualities for political parties to exhibit. The numbers show here that it was important for: 72% of young Italians, 67% of young Germans and 66% of Polish. This does not surprise as the generation in question perceives these rather as a part of their lives – perhaps even, one can risk saying, not remembering the reality without these. The disturbing news is however that the progressive parties are not seen as the ones having this skill – in Italy it is 5 Star Movement, which stands up with 47% of attribution, in Hungary Jobbik with 41%, while in Poland and Bulgaria these were governing Civic Platform and GERB (with 31% and 41% respectively).

To grasp how crucial that is, it is key to look at what the Millennials see the most effective way to campaign. That underpinned the question: *which means they would use to start a political campaign*. In fact, overwhelming majority of young Polish, Italians and Germans stated that they would set off by *using social media* (such as Facebook or Twitter). The numbers here are: 84% for Polish, and 75% for both Italians and Germans. Consequently,

they would see *creating a youtube video* as one of the good methods to get their message across – which view was shared by 78% of young Polish, 66% of young Italians and 59% of young Germans. These numbers are respectively lower for Hungary and Bulgaria, however they still come as the main answers. 49% of young Bulgarians and 30% of young Bulgarians would embark on the campaign starting all from social media, while 31% and 19% of them respectively would go for a youtube video. More popular than video's were app's created for the campaign – as those were seen effective by 61% of Polish, 59% of Germans, 54% of Italians, 25% of Bulgarians and 15% of Hungarians.

The Millennials would focus their efforts on social media, however this does not mean that they would not seek also appearing on tv or radio should they be in charge of a campaign. For the young Polish it would be the first communication channel that they would try to use – so said 87% of respondents, which is 3% higher number than the level of support for the social networks. The same disparity was between the scores for young Germans, of whom 77% would stick to tv or radio. In case of Italy the gap between the two was also small, with 1% only – since more traditional media polled at 74%. The numbers for Bulgaria and Hungary are lower – respectively placed at 44% and 22%, however also these young respondents see tv and radio as at least second important medium.

In terms of acquiring further credibility for their actions, without exception Millennials would rather ask a well-know personality (celebrity) than a local politician or Member of Parliament from their constituency. A celebrity would be asked by 80% of young Germans, 78% of young Polish, 64% of young Italians, 39% of young Bulgarians, 21% of Hungarians. That contrasts with the numbers assigned to the politicians: 75% of Polish, 65% of Germans, 56% of young Italians, 24% of young Bulgarians and 11% of young Hungarians. The disparity in between the two is quite large (with exception of Poland), which brings along a reflection that the younger generation surprisingly so find celebrities somewhat more accessible (see section 7) and credibility ensuring than they do regarding politicians.

Last but not least, though the social media scored very high among the Millennials as a platform to start and run a campaign, still they remain quite fond of the traditional mobilisation methods. What may surprise is that majority of them would see an actual real-time activity an essential inauguration of any political actions. Majority considered an event that would be including a cultural part (concert, festival) in conjunction with a talk as very appealing – so said 79% of Polish, 66% of Italians, 65% of Germans, and 35% of Bulgarians. It was placed relatively low within the choice of methods by young Hungarians – reaching 17%, but still it was placed as 5<sup>th</sup> most favourable form of initiating an action<sup>21</sup>. Less would hold a *peaceful* demonstration (67% of Polish, 64% of Germans, 65% of Italians, 26% of Bulgarians, 13% of Hungarians) and definitely less than that would opt for a disruptive demonstration (50% of Italians, 40% of Polish, 34% of Germans, 23% of Bulgarians, 9% of Hungarians). The ideas such as handing a petition to the government, designing stickers or posters or a graffiti scored in the lower half of preferable methods.

**The conclusion arriving from these is that even if the Millennials feel that their priorities are 'lost in translation', still they do exhibit readiness to mobilise and join or launch a political action.** They are very clear what ways they find efficient to communicate the message and rally support. As a generation living a digital era, they do consider internet an important medium – but that does not make them disregard neither traditional

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<sup>21</sup> In general, the numbers showing what the young Hungarians are finding to be “most useful means that they would use to start a campaign” are lower in comparison with data from 4 other states – ranging in between 30% for social media and 7% for graffiti.

broadcasters (tv or radio) or the power of one-to-one meetings. That should be of a relief to the parties, which should herewith feel that the assumed tensions between i.e. canvassing and Internet door knocking is simply not real.

**The question that remains for the debate among the progressives is how to transform their campaigns into set of actions, that can mobilise equally effectively in the real (canvassing, meetings) as in the virtual (tv, radio, internet) worlds. The first one would require making political rallies closer to cultural, exciting and emotionally loaded experiences. The second would require consistent strategy that would make sure to use all the media in a manner, which would make all broadcasts mutually reinforcing and multiplication inducing.**

**10. Millennials may not be keen on voting in the European elections, but they are a generation that wants to live an interrelated Europe and a peaceful world.**

The political discourse of the last two decades has been focused on underlining how interconnected the world has become. This phenomena broadly known as globalisation has been painted as a side effect of transposition of capital onto the world stage. That meant that the multinational companies began to move freely across the globe following their instincts in terms of where they sensed the conditions to be most favourable and where consequently their business would flourish the most. This brought along a different set of challenges, including among them a profoundly new understanding of competitiveness. While there has been an agreement that there is a limit to those freedoms and certain standards must be obeyed (following the ILO – International Labour Organisation and especially WTO – World Trade Organisation charters), still much has been left in a grey zone. That was one of the profound reasons for which the debate started about the inadequacy of the post-war system (the Bretton Woods agreement) and a need for a new deal. It would have to limit the competition that could often be named ‘race to the bottom in terms of the labour standards’ and focus on sustainability.

At the same time, Europe and EU member states felt compelled to remain a powerful global player in this changing, multi-polar world. Economically that meant embarking on a new strategy (known as Lisbon Strategy), which was aiming at making them “the most competitive knowledge-based economy” of the world. Politically it meant forging further integration, which required on one hand stronger political backing, on the other it had to include speaking with one, joint voice on the global level. Though certain progress has been made – both the socio-economic and the political plans did not result in the desired outcomes. To the contrary, EU seems to have been bouncing from one to another predicament, being vulnerable at the point when the crash of 2008 arrived to its gates.

With both those factors – a deficiency of the existing global order and the EU that is described as an organisation almost permanently in crisis – there is a valid question to ask, how Millennials feel about those developments. To that end, it is of crucial importance to know what their take on the future of the both is; especially that at least in terms of the EU the worrying factor is their declining participation in the subsequent elections.

In majority of cases the Millennials share a view that politicians should be working to ensure that their country plays a role on the international stage. 89% of young Polish, 86% of young Hungarians, 85% of young Bulgarians 84% of young Italians and 76% of young Germans see it

as a valid objective in political terms. These numbers show that in fact the younger generation is, if not preoccupied with the global context they live in, at least aware of the interconnectivity and interdependence. While that is the case, surprisingly many of the respondents share the views that the politicians are fostering their countries' strong position internationally. It is a reflection shared by: 78% of Germans<sup>22</sup>, 70% of Polish, 60% of Italians, 35% of Hungarians and 22% of Bulgarians.

When it comes to Europe, Millennials prove to be predominantly pro-European. 90% of Bulgarians believe that politicians should sustain and develop closer relations with Europe, which is shared by 85% of Polish, 84% of Hungarians, 80% of Italians, 79% of Germans. What seems quite interesting is that the sentiment is to a certain degree stronger within the countries that are Members of the EU for a shorter period of time. Another puzzling aspect is that while Millennials see the European cooperation as one of the priorities, they seem also to be overall satisfied with the performance of the politicians on that field. 85% of Polish believe that the politicians do enough to promote further consolidation, 66% of Italians, 40% of Bulgarians and 39% of Hungarians. The number that stands out is 83% of the young German, who share that view. This may mean that the number of those convinced that the politicians deliver in this dimension is surpassing the one indicating the level of actual expectations. Hypothetically it can even point towards certain slight resentment of the young Germans to the scale or format of their country's informal leadership in Europe. Additionally, the figures from Poland and Italy do not surprise in a sense that when the polling was being done, there was already a tip-toeing of the top politicians within those states towards key positions within the legislative of the new mandate. Hence EU and these countries' position within that was strongly in a debate. Finally, the percentage of Bulgarians and Hungarians satisfied with their countries in terms of their European policies is comparably smaller. But it can be explained, if to take the account the specificity of their respective situations (and here especially the diverse allegation about still corrupted political powers in Sofia and externally contested governance of Prime Minister Orbán). It may make the populations feel rather distanced and thus peripheral.

Last but not least, the attitudes of the young Europeans regarding *building and maintaining military force* may be considered as relatively astonishing. That is because a vast majority declare themselves to be in favour – with Polish and Bulgarians scoring on the highest level, namely with 82% and 78% respectively. Less convinced are the others – with 58% of Hungarians, 53% of Italians and 43% of Germans<sup>23</sup>. Although there is no indication if Millennials mean that growing the potential should be ensured through raising a professional military force or through universal draft, still the trend would stipulate that they find defence capacity relevant. Hence they prove themselves less certain about peaceful coexistence worldwide than the generation of their parents used to be. New standards that they try to set may also explain why many think that the politicians do not do enough in this aspect, with exception of Italy and Germany, where young people believe that more than sufficient actions are undertaken (respectively with the score 73% for Italy and 49% for Germany). In the Central and Eastern European sample the numbers are far below expectations levels – with 66% of young Polish, 28% of young Hungarians and 22% of young Bulgarians.

**The conclusion arriving from these is that Millennials generation may not appear euro-enthusiastic in electorally behavioural sense, but remains convinced about the necessity of both international and European cooperation.** In that sense they are very appreciative to

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<sup>22</sup> which is even a higher number than the one showing how many of them consider that a priority

<sup>23</sup> The data does not specify if this is a professional army or one based on universal recruitment that they are referring to.

the work that is being done by the state's representatives on the global and the Union's level, while expecting more however in terms of their inner policies that would foster their country's military capacity. That seems striking and would point towards an obvious feeling of the Millennials' insecurity regarding the feasibility of a promise of a global peaceful coexistence.

**The question that remains for the debate among the progressive is how to modernise its global and European agendas, so that they can present a tangible promise of a peaceful future of sustainably developing world. What underpins that is a challenge to change the narrative. It is not necessary to convince the Millennials that the international and European cooperation important, as they are aware of that. What is essential is to prove that it needs to advance, providing new guarantees and reaching new horizons.**